

THE HUMANISM OF MAX FRISCH AS REVEALED  
IN HIS PLAYS 1945 - 1961

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BARBARA (KELLY) LEWIS



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in his Plays 1945-1961

by



Barbara (Kelly) Lewis

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## ABSTRACT

Max Frisch, a Swiss, and one-time professional architect, is considered one of the most important literary men writing in German since World War II. He cannot easily be classified in conventional literary terms; his scope of artistic activity is too broad and therefore evades a single and clear-cut definition. This thesis is primarily concerned with Max Frisch, the playwright.

There are numerous ways in which one can view the theatrical efforts of Frisch. He is often considered a devoted disciple of Bertolt Brecht, an antithetical imitator of Thornton Wilder, and a friendly rival of Friedrich Dürrenmatt. I have chosen a less comparative view of Frisch's plays, and will concentrate on one essential feature of his dramaturgy: - how his plays reflect his personal and lingering humanistic concerns.

Frisch's sincere interest in the humanistic ethic is, however, crucially different from the humanism of the past. This new understanding of the meaning of humanism will be discussed in the introductory pages of this thesis. The inhumanity clearly displayed during World War II was the instigating factor for Frisch's serious and sincere probing of man, the social and political creature. This thesis is an attempt to show that this theme forms an essential continuous thread of thought through five of his most important plays written between 1945 and 1961: Nun singen sie wieder (1945), Als der Krieg zu Ende war (1949), Die Chinesische Mauer (1946, 1955), Biedermann und die Brandstifter (1958) and Andorra (1961). These

plays demonstrate Frisch's concern for the condition of man and the condition of the world, a concern which underlies his understanding of humanism.

## Preface



Max Frisch, a Swiss, and one-time professional architect, is considered one of the most important literary men writing in German since World War II. He cannot easily be classified in conventional literary terms; his scope of artistic activity is too broad and therefore evades a single and clear-cut definition. He is a sometimes novelist, a sometimes playwright, an ardent diarist, a speech maker, a freelance journalist, an essayist, a radio play script writer, and a political and social critic. This thesis is primarily concerned with Max Frisch, the playwright, although I have drawn on his other activities for resource material which is particularly applicable to the underlying theme of the thesis. One cannot analyze a single aspect of his work in isolation, as all his contributions to the various genres contain recurring patterns of thought, which when synthesized, produce a complete picture of Frisch, the man and the writer.

There are numerous ways in which one can view the theatrical efforts of Frisch. He is often considered a devoted disciple of Bertolt Brecht, an antithetical imitator of Thornton Wilder, and a friendly rival of Friedrich Dürrenmatt. I have chosen a less comparative view of Frisch's plays, and will concentrate on one essential feature of his dramaturgy: - how his plays reflect his personal and lingering humanistic concerns.

In one of his most important Second World War essays Frisch calls himself a humanist.<sup>1</sup> His sincere interest in the humanistic ethic

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<sup>1</sup>"Kultur als Alibi", Öffentlichkeit als Partner (Frankfurt a. M., 1967), p. 17.

is, however, crucially different from the humanism of the past. This new understanding of the meaning of humanism will be discussed in the introductory pages of this thesis. The inhumanity clearly displayed during World War II was the instigating factor for Frisch's serious and sincere probing of man, the social and political creature. This thesis is an attempt to show that this theme forms an essential continuous thread of thought through five of his most important plays written between 1945 and 1961: Nun singen sie wieder (1945), Als der Krieg zu Ende war (1949), Die Chinesische Mauer (1946, 1955), Biedermann und die Brandstifter (1958), and Andorra (1961). These may be labelled his 'public' plays; they most aptly demonstrate the playwright's 'engagement' and his concern for real conditions and events outside the walls of the theatre. I have excluded Santa Cruz (1944), Graf Öderland (1951, 1955), and Don Juan oder die Liebe zur Geometrie (1951), because these plays are of a more introspective, personal and poetic nature and as such are not immediately relevant to the discussion of Frisch's humanism. His last play Biografie: ein Spiel (1967) is also not included. It falls into neither the 'public' nor 'private' category, but stands alone as evidence of Frisch's constant experimentation with the theatrical medium. In the introduction to the fifth chapter I have briefly mentioned his two 'private' plays of the fifties, along with two novels of the same decade, Stiller (1954) and Homo Faber (1957), and have indicated some basic issues, each of which can be related to questions portrayed in the five 'public' plays.

Throughout the thesis all references to the plays are taken from the standard two volume edition Stücke I and Stücke II, (Frankfurt

a. M., 1962).

I intend to show that Frisch views the theatre as a vehicle of communication, as a means of confronting the public with his own thoughts on--and doubts about--the nature of conventional twentieth century life. Although he does not believe that the theatre can directly change the world, he does value it as a means of forcing the public to examine the habits and attitudes which make up their own lives. In doing this, Frisch, the playwright, hopes to change public opinion, by presenting issues without answers. He leaves the audience to ponder over what they have seen on stage, trusting that they themselves will search out answers and solutions.

His concern for the condition of man and the condition of the world characterizes Frisch's understanding of humanism. As a playwright, he has endeavoured to convey this concern to others. We will now see how successful his efforts have been.

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## Introduction

Frisch's humanism

Humanism remains an ambiguous and many-faceted concept, and has undergone a variety of changes in meaning throughout the centuries. A brief discussion of humanism will suffice to demonstrate how Frisch's understanding of the word differs significantly from traditional interpretations.

Humanism, as we understand it, evolved during the Golden Age of Greece in the fifth century B.C. The western world received its introduction to the Greek concept of humanism via the Romans, whose imitation of and admiration for the Greek way of life established firmly the humanistic ethic on the European continent.

This humanism was synonymous with intellectualism and artistic refinement and was rooted in the ideals expounded by the Greek philosophers. The word 'humanitas' was consequently coined by the Romans to express the harmonious balance in all aspects of human behavior as displayed during the flowering of Greek civilization. This became a distinctly positive word, incorporating all the grandiose and laudable human traits exhibited in intellectual and civilized behavior. The 'homo humanus' of Roman times was characterized by his refined taste and conduct, his love of beauty and wisdom, and his reverence for his gods, all based on the example of the Greeks. The 'homo barbarus' on the other hand was easily recognizable, and betrayed by his ignorance of the Greek legacy and his general uncivilized mode of life. This sharp distinction between

'homo humanus' and 'homo barbarus', between a cultured individual and a barbaric one, is shown by Frisch to be a fantasy.

The 'homo humanus' became the first practising traditional humanist, adapting the Greek ideal to his own life. Humanism, therefore, found its first definition among the intelligentsia of the Roman Empire. It came to be accepted as the life-style and philosophy of a small sector of the population and thus had significance only in intellectual and elite circles. The basis of this humanism was the unquestioned understanding of man as a part of creation set aside from and placed above other living creatures. His mind and his creative potential were his glorified assets, and were lauded by the thinkers of the era. The Roman contribution to all spheres of human activity: government, education, literature, philosophy, architecture, and art, stands as tangible evidence of the 'homo humanus' efforts.

Traditionally, humanism, is associated with the re-discovery of Roman and Greek civilizations during the Renaissance in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The age of Erasmus, Thomas Moore, Rabelais, Raphael, Leonardo de Vinci, and Michelangelo constituted a re-awakening of the intellect following the so-called Dark Ages. Once again, as in Greek and Roman times, man was viewed as a beautiful and divine creature of enormous mental and artistic potential.

Delight in every kind of human behavior and achievement was the main tenet of this revised humanistic spirit. Man was once again considered a creature of intellectual and ethical value, contradicting the medieval Christian belief that he was nothing in the face of God and universal creation. The Renaissance humanist was a new type--the universal and worldly man--whose intellectual vitality is today evident in the many legacies of beauty and inspiration which this era bequeathed to future generations. The humanism of the Renaissance was in essence a rejuvenated intellectualism directed at the glorification of the human species. This form of humanism is again antithetical to Frisch's. Instead of lauding human accomplishment, Frisch shows us man's imperfections, in an effort to present a more balanced and realistic picture of twentieth century human behavior.

In the nineteenth century the publication of Darwin's The Origin of the Species produced incontestable evidence that no wide and impassable gulf existed between homo sapiens and the rest of nature. Man was shown to be related biologically to the lower forms of life, not created in a divine image as a sacred and separate being, but also possessing animal traits which were previously considered inhuman. The results of Darwin's study were most significant for the eventual framing of a new, more realistic understanding of humanism, a humanism which accepted the Darwinian definition of man and which



endeavoured to promote a modern understanding of human behavior using natural science this time as its basis. Although blessed with the ability to think, man was still an animal, possessing animal characteristics which were an inherent part of his nature. This evidence proved to be a turning point in the interpretation of humanism, and resulted in a deep-rooted pessimism displayed by intellectuals during the last half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century.

Frisch alerts us to this human dichotomy early in his dramatic works and journalistic writings. He rejects a narrow concept of humanism which stresses only one side of man's nature and which ignores such questions as the relationship between culture and barbarism.

Traditional concepts of humanism had very little to do with the humane treatment of man. Humanism was an academic and intellectual activity whose chief concern was scholarly study of man's achievements in the past, unrelated to the condition of man in the present day. In the past, humanism was simply a mental occupation, a sphere of activity solely for the educated. Only in recent times has the interest in humanism indicated a genuine concern for the present day plight of man, a moral concern, not an academic one. Modern theories of humanism pertain more to matters of personal conscience and are directed towards humane as well as

intellectual activity. Such is the case with Frisch.

The tragedy of World War II and the horrors of Auschwitz destroyed completely the last threads of humanistic thinking concerning man's higher and nobler nature. All previously accepted meanings of humanism now appeared senseless in the light of man's barbarism. In 1946, the philosopher, Heidegger replied to Jean Beaufret's question: "Comment redonner un sens au mot 'humanisme'?" in a lengthy published letter entitled Über den Humanismus, (Bern, 1954). Although this study is basically an attempt to formulate an adequate reply, by presenting a lengthy philosophical argument concerning what can be classified as human and inhuman, it cannot be overlooked. The fact that the question was posed indicates that probing into traditional humanistic values became intensified after the war. By the time Heidegger finished his analysis of humanism, Frisch had already written Nun singen sie wieder and had seen it performed on stage. The subject of this play is the undermining of all previously accepted humanistic values, and will be discussed in Chapter II. The collapse of the previously accepted concept of humanism left a vacuum which was eventually filled with a new interpretation of its meaning and value in twentieth century life.

The hallmark of this new post-Third-Reich humanism was its reverence for life, for the individual, based on an acceptance of the individual's moral responsibility for the

commonweal. The proponents of this new form of humanism were devoted to promoting humane behavior, rather than scholarly research or philosophical meditation. In his works, Frisch gives us an analysis of man's condition in the mid-twentieth century, exposing man as anything but noble and beautiful. By undermining what he considers to be a false and weak humanism, Frisch shows man as he often behaves--a greedy, self-centered, inhuman and immoral being. He advocates a new functional humanism based on a practical life credo. His medium is the drama and prose of commitment and protest.

Eduard Stäuble recognizes Frisch's efforts as humanistic, based on love of his fellow men, not as intellectual entities, but as imperfect embodiments of the divine and animalistic. At the end of his short study Max Frisch, Gedankliche Grundzüge in seinen Werken, (Basel, 1970), Stäuble alerts us to Frisch's personal humanism:

Wenn es erlaubt ist, 'Humanismus' schlechthin als liebende Anteilnahme am Wesen und am Schicksal des einzelnen Menschen zu deuten, dann dürfen wir das Schaffen Max Frischs als ein eminent humanistisches, nämlich menschenfreundliches bezeichnen. Nicht um einen abgestandenen und überholten Humanismus handelt es sich allerdings, um einen, der von einem festgefügtten, erhabenen und überheblichen Menschenbild ausginge, zu welchem es den Menschen hinanzuformen gälte. Nein. Den Menschen in seiner ganzen lebendigen, wandlungsfähigen, gestaltungsreichen und geheimnisvollen Vielfalt, den Menschen als immer wieder neues und erregendes Rätsel meint und liebt der Dichter. Aus dieser Liebe zur Kreatur ist sein ganzes bisheriges Werk gewachsen, ein Werk, das wir in seinen positiven Werten immer deutlicher erkennen. (pp. 39-40)

Stäuble's comment reminds us of a similar statement made by Frisch in his Tagebuch in July 1949, and repeated again in a speech delivered

to the Deutsche Akademie für Sprache und Dichtung in Darmstadt in 1958. "Heimat ist der Mensch, dessen Wesen wir vernehmen und erreichen."<sup>1</sup> His feeling for the individual and his efforts as a writer to produce "Bilder, nichts als Bilder und immer wieder Bilder, verzweifelte, unverzweifelte, Bilder der Kreatur, solange sie lebt;"<sup>2</sup> characterize Frisch's code of humanism.

Humanism, in this sense, is the concern of this thesis. It is everywhere apparent in Frisch's dramatic and prose works, as well as in his many journalistic articles and speeches. He once wrote of Bertolt Brecht: "seine Poesie ist sein Ernst, seine Liebe zum Menschen. Und seine Schönheit, scheint mir, liegt in der Würde seines Anliegens."<sup>3</sup> This statement could well serve as a fitting epigram for Frisch's own literary pursuits.

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<sup>1</sup>Tagebuch 1946-1949 (München: Droemer Verlag, 1967), p.296. This book will hereafter be referred to in the short form Tagebuch.

<sup>2</sup>Öffentlichkeit als Partner (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1967), p. 55.

<sup>3</sup>"Zu Bert Brecht: Furcht und Elend des Dritten Reiches", Schweizer Annalen, III, viii, 1946/47, p. 481.

## Chapter I

### The Cultural Pessimism of Max Frisch

Any analysis of the contribution which Max Frisch has made to the dramatic and narrative genres of the post Second World War era must include an examination of an elemental issue which pervades every facet of his work, from his earliest diaries, through his essayistic publications and his frequent speeches, to his later stage productions and novels:- his interpretation of "Kultur". This question lies at the core of all his efforts, not only in his occupation as a writer and architect, but also as a Swiss citizen of the twentieth century. Frisch was convinced that the narrow view of "Kultur" prevalent in central Europe and particularly in Germany for the last two centuries was shallow and false and in certain ways contributed to the Nazi tragedy which was still very fresh in the minds and lives of his public. His concern for a complete revaluation of the attitude to "Kultur" is closely related to his understanding of the artist's role in society. This viewpoint also differs from the traditional attitude held by prominent literary figures of the past. By closely studying these two inter-related points, I shall endeavour to demonstrate that Max Frisch is essentially an advocate of a new post Third Reich Humanism.

His many references to "Kultur" in his Tagebuch 1946-1949,<sup>1</sup> the first major published work which affords us a deep insight into Frisch, the man and writer, all stem from reflections on a similar theme: the German interpretation of "Kultur" as restricted to the

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<sup>1</sup>I have my own doubts concerning the authenticity of the Tagebuch as a historical diary. There is evidence that some material contained in the earliest entries was written and published at a prior date. See in particular "Death is so Permanent", in Neue Schweizer Rundschau, Vol. XIV, 1946-47, pp. 88-110.

fine arts and its relation to the events of 1939 - 1945:

Der Begriff der Kultur - (eine der großen, dringenden Fragen, die mich immer wieder beschäftigt, obschon sie meine Denkkraft immer sehr bald übersteigt) - Kultur, Kunst, Politik ... Eines geht sicher nicht: daß man Kultur reduziert auf Kunst, daß ein Volk sich einredet, es habe Kultur, weil es Sinfonien hat. Zu den entscheidenden Erfahrungen, die unsere Generation, ... hat machen können, gehört wohl die, daß Menschen die voll sind von jener Kultur, Kenner, die sich mit Geist und Inbrust unterhalten können über Bach, Händel, Mozart, Beethoven, Bruckner, ohne weiteres auch als Schlächter auftreten können; beides in gleicher Person. ... Kultur in diesem Sinn, begriffen als Götze, der sich mit unsrer künstlerischen oder wissenschaftlichen Leistung begnügt und hintenherum das Blut unsrer Brüder leckt, Kultur als moralische Schizophrenie ist in unserem Jahrhundert eigentlich die landläufige.<sup>2</sup>

Although this passage is much quoted, it is nevertheless very germane to my theme. It is significant that Frisch records these thoughts during a visit to Hamburg in November 1948. Here he was confronted with the devastation of a war which was waged by a supposedly cultured society. The realization of Nazi atrocities prompted Frisch to reconsider how it was possible that cultured individuals condoned these acts of inhumanity. He clearly expounds his personal dissatisfaction with the narrow definition of "Kultur", a definition which sequesters art and morality, and which excludes all but aesthetic activity. For many years Frisch was preoccupied with these and related questions.

Later in an essay "Kultur als Alibi" first published in Der Monat, (1949, No. 7), appearing again in a collection of some of his more controversial speeches and essays, Öffentlichkeit als Partner,

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<sup>2</sup>Max Frisch, Tagebuch, pp.239-240. See also: pp. 88, 89, 127, 128, 242, 243.

(Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1967), Frisch elaborates more fully on the distorted view of "Kultur" upheld by many Germans, criticizing it sternly, since he considers it to be dangerous and totally unrealistic. Much of this essay is very similar to passages in the Tagebuch:

Nennen wir es, was diese Menschenart auszeichnet, eine ästhetische Kultur. Ihr besonderes Kennzeichen ist die Unverbindlichkeit. Es ist eine Geistesart, die das Erhabenste denken und das Niederste nicht verhindern kann, eine Kultur, die sich säuberlich über die Forderungen des Tages erhebt. ... Es ist nicht überraschend, aber erschreckend, wie viele Briefe aus Deutschland eben diese Geistesart vertreten; sie erwähnen, wenn von der deutschen Frage gesprochen wird, immer wieder Goethe, Hölderlin, Beethoven, Mozart, und alle die anderen, die Deutschland hervorgebracht hat, und es geschieht fast immer im gleichen Sinn: Genie als Alibi. Im Grunde ist es die harmlos-gräßliche Vorstellung, ein Volk habe Kultur, wenn es Sinfonien habe, und in den gleichen Zirkel gehört natürlich jene hehre Vorstellung vom Künstler, der, ledig aller Zeitgenossenschaft, ganz und gar in den Sphären reinen Geistes lebt, so daß er im übrigen durchaus ein Schurke sein darf, beispielsweise als Staatsbürger, überhaupt als Glied der menschlichen Gesellschaft. Er ist einfach ein Priester des Ewigen, das seinen täglichen Verrat schon überdauern wird.<sup>3</sup>

Frisch's rejection of a "Kultur" comprising aesthetics alone is by no means unique. Since the time of Rousseau, who first expressed his doubts concerning the true value of human progress, many thinkers have also condemned the virtues of artistic achievement. Rousseau, in his attack on all aspects of eighteenth century society, chose the god of that society, art, as a main target of his criticism. He favoured a return to man's primitive, unsophisticated state, because he viewed the society of his time as morally corrupt, in spite of the progress and achievements which had been attained. In an effort to

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<sup>3</sup>Öffentlichkeit als Partner (Frankfurt a. M., 1967), p. 21.



emphasize some of the evils which did exist, he deliberately denied the beauty and value of all artistic endeavours, as well as all progress made in every area of knowledge. Ludwig Marcuse calls Rousseau "der Vater des Kultur-Pessimismus",<sup>4</sup> because he did instigate the rebellion against the "Glanz der Kultur" which continued into the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

If Rousseau's ideas seemed extreme in his lifetime, when compared with those of Friedrich Nietzsche a century later, they now appear considerably milder. Nietzsche's attack on the ideals and values of nineteenth century society was even more devastating. In his writings, Nietzsche presents an analysis of all the weaknesses in the world around him, stating that man had become too intellectual, too rational, thereby distorting the real value of life. Man had brought on his own degeneration by following the false and weak-kneed Christian ethics of purity, equality and humility, which repressed man's true bestial nature; man had become a moral slave, imprisoned by his own values. According to Nietzsche, all intellectual activity was ~~nothing~~ more than a mask worn to hide man's inner cowardice and weaknesses. He appealed to mankind to dispense with intellectual interests which could only debase and diminish man's capacity for more vital undertakings. He advocated replacing the existing society of intellectual weaklings with a new social system based on strength, cunning and physical superiority. In essence, he proposed a return to the law of the jungle, a primitive way of life without the calm and

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<sup>4</sup>"Kultur-Pessimismus", Merkur, Nov. 1958, 12. Jg., Heft 11, p. 1003.

innocence of Rousseau's vision. He, too, was a major critic of cultural achievement, a total nihilist, whose cure for society's ills was perhaps ingenious, but completely unrealistic.

The pessimistic appraisal of man's future in a world of intellectual and material refinement was further continued by Oswald Spengler in his book Der Untergang des Abendlandes, (Volume I, 1918; Volume II, 1922). Here again was stressed the moral decadence of a supposedly progressive way of life, a supposedly cultured society.

At this point, it should be obvious that Frisch differs from the above mentioned critics of society, not only in approach, but also in intensity. Ursula Roisch notes that:

Er setzt weder die kulturkritische Linie eines Nietzsche oder Spengler fort, noch engagiert er sich für das andere Extrem. Die Suche nach dem verlorengegangenen Lebenssinn ist ... für Frisch letzten Endes eine humanistische Fragestellung, ein faustisches Problem. Es geht ihm um Orientierungspunkte für die schöpferische menschliche Tätigkeit ... nicht um 'anthropologisch Fundamentales'.<sup>5</sup>

Frisch's criticism is aimed at a narrow interpretation of "Kultur", a "Kultur" confined only to the fine arts, and not at a more inclusive interpretation which would incorporate the many facets of human accomplishments, intellectual and non-intellectual. He is not a total pessimist, but applies himself as much to the task of constructing a new way of looking at the meaning of "Kultur" as to that of criticizing the existing attitude to it. Ludwig Marcuse uses the term "Diagnostiker" to contrast contemporary social critics with the

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<sup>5</sup>"Max Frischs Auffassung vom Einfluß der Technik auf den Menschen--Nachgewiesen am Roman Homo Faber," in Über Max Frisch, Thomas Beckermann, ed., (Frankfurt a. M., 1971), p. 92.

"Pessimisten" of the past:

Diese Diagnostiker sind keine Pessimisten; die Aufzeigung des Irrwegs der Kultur ist nicht kulturfeindlich. Die Therapien sind: Aufforderung an das Individuum, sich zu verbessern; an die Gesellschaft, sich zu ändern.<sup>6</sup>

Frisch, in his joint devotion to criticism and change, can be numbered among these modern "Diagnostiker".

Returning to the question of "Kultur", a semantic confusion needs first to be clarified before one can fully grasp Frisch's adamant probing of its meaning in twentieth century society. For many people in the German-speaking world "Kultur" had become synonymous with music, painting and literature, with names such as Goethe, Schiller, Thomas Mann, Bach, Beethoven, Mozart, Dürrenmatt and Dürer.<sup>7</sup> The position of the artist in society had become almost sacred, beyond comment or reproach from the common people. Often, the artist was viewed with god-like awe and assumed to be at once separate from, and superior to the realities of life which engaged other people. There existed in German-speaking Europe an artistic aristocracy, a cultured elite, isolated and independent from the exigencies of real life. "Kultur", for many, had become "reduziert auf Kunst"<sup>8</sup> and was less frequently used in its broader meaning--civilization. According to Frisch, one cannot distil out of civilization--which is also "Kultur"--music, art and literature

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<sup>6</sup>"Kultur-Pessimismus", Merkur, Nov. 1958, 12. Jg., Heft 11, p. 1011.

<sup>7</sup>This tendency to restrict the meaning of "Kultur" is, in Frisch's opinion, stronger among German speakers than anywhere else, but his first war play Nun singen sie wieder demonstrates that it is not confined to Germany.

<sup>8</sup>See Footnote 2, Chapter I.

and say that these and only these characterize a civilized and cultured community. He therefore criticizes the German tendency to restrict the use of the word to the fine arts and attempts to make his public aware of its broader meaning.

Since the time of Goethe's Torquato Tasso (begun in 1780) the German public had become well acquainted with the artist's inability to reconcile his private activity with a successful political and social life. Barker Fairley makes this clear in his comprehensive study of Goethe's life and work. He concludes that "... we now regard Tasso as the first notable treatment in European literature of this private or anti-social conception of the artist."<sup>9</sup> Since the appearance of Tasso, the lonely, melancholy outcast artist has been a recurring theme in German literature. There are critics who will argue, though, that Goethe intended Tasso to be a negative figure, that many readers failed to recognize Goethe's irony when he created Tasso and consequently a complete misunderstanding of Goethe's attitude to artistic and intellectual endeavour was the result. Yet, although Goethe himself attempted to integrate his poetic interests and his social-political interests, being fully aware of the eventual negative effects of continual artistic activity, he admits in a letter written November 21, 1782: "... ich habe mein politisches und gesellschaftliches Leben ganz von meinem moralischen und poetischen getrennt."<sup>10</sup> Goethe did not ignore politics, but he was unable to live up to his own ideal; he was unable to reconcile politics

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<sup>9</sup>A Study of Goethe. (Oxford, 1947), p. 77.

<sup>10</sup>Quoted by Fairley, op. cit., p. 74.

with art. This division between one's moral and political allegiances and one's poetic interests was attacked continually by Frisch, as will be seen below.

Goethe set the pattern for the nineteenth century, and even the first half of the twentieth century. There was very little social conscience expressed by German men of letters during this period, excluding Schiller and Büchner, whose influence has always been secondary to Goethe's. Albert William Levi recognizes the tremendous sway of Goethe's example over the minds of his future public when he states:

The fact that a figure of the commanding stature of Goethe should make the great refusal of politics, should establish with force and authority the stereotype of the productive and self-sufficient artist withdrawn from the political arena as from a plague, was to dominate the cultural life of Germany for one hundred and fifty years, and to foreshadow in ways yet unforeseen the tragedy of the Third Reich.<sup>11</sup>

The nineteenth century abounds with German artists, writers and philosophers whose solitude and withdrawal from society produced a harvest of broken lives. Hölderlin and Nietzsche eventually go mad. Kleist commits suicide. Kant becomes a recluse in Königsberg and Schopenhauer spends most of his life alone in a small boarding house in Frankfurt with a sole canine companion.

The artist-intellectual as a social outsider syndrome is further perpetrated in the twentieth century by that giant of German prose fiction, Thomas Mann, at least in his earliest and perhaps best known works. Characters such as Tonio Kröger, Gustav Aschenbach and Detlev Spinell come readily to mind. They represent the artist-intellectual, the counterpart of the normal, unproblematic, healthy

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<sup>11</sup>Humanism and Politics (Indiana University, 1969), p. 113.

burgher whose feet are planted squarely on the ground and whose mental energies are devoted solely to the immediate concrete demands of middle-class society. The artist-intellectual, on the other hand, is continually plagued with emotional and physical handicaps; he remains estranged from the simple and happy life of normal men and women and devotes his whole being to self-consuming artistic creation. In his discourse Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen (1918) Mann celebrates art as man's highest vocation and supports its autonomous nature, free from political or social commitment, exposing his own apolitical inclination and his aversion to 'worldly' matters. When one considers how widely read his works were in his own lifetime, the fact that politics was viewed by the intelligentsia as a debasing element in the midst of cultural development is not a surprising outcome. Only in his later works, completed in exile, after the rise of the Nazi government, does Mann realize and admit how mistaken and even dangerous this attitude proved to be. In an essay entitled "Kultur und Politik", first published in 1939, Mann repudiates openly the thesis of his 1918 treatise, and recognizes at last that art cannot be separated from politics or morality, quoting the emergence of National Socialism as living evidence of his former erroneous viewpoint.<sup>12</sup> His most pessimistic novel Doktor Faustus (1947) demonstrates his changed attitude toward the artistic individual, illustrating the potential evil, criminal-like results of inward-looking creativeness.

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<sup>12</sup>See Thomas Mann, Order of the Day: Political Essays and Speeches of Two Decades, H. T. Lowe-Porter, trans., (New York, 1942), pp. 228-230 in particular.

The self-centred, self-sufficient 'l'art pour l'art' philosophy was carried to an even greater extreme in the early years of the century by the German poet Stefan George. He viewed the artist as a seer, a prophet, and even a 'god' whose creations were not to be exposed to the masses, but only to a chosen few. He formed around him a circle of devoted 'apostles' who shared his revered opinions concerning the role of creative talent, setting himself the task of bringing dignity and sanctity back to German art after the prosaism of nineteenth century Naturalism. He endeavoured to keep the domain of poetry within an enclosure which would protect it from the debasing influences of the real world. Art became a religion, a 'god' unto itself and was worshiped as a deity. George was viewed as the 'High Priest' of this new poetic cult. When Frisch speaks of the poet as a "Priester des Ewigen"<sup>13</sup> and condemns him for his social and moral myopia, one is reminded of the George Circle.

It was precisely the above-mentioned attitudes to art, culture, society and politics which fell into discredit in the post Second World War years. Ludwig Marcuse's following statement gives a compact and illuminating appraisal of the new cultural pessimism:

Der Kultur-Pessimismus konnte erst entstehen, nachdem die Vorstellung 'Kultur' sich gebildet hatte--und so göttlich geworden war, daß es für viele keinen Gott mehr gab neben ihr; der Kultur-Pessimismus ist die Reaktion auf die letzte Entgötterung gewesen.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Öffentlichkeit als Partner (Frankfurt, a. M., 1967), p. 21.

<sup>14</sup>"Kultur-Pessimismus", Merkur, Nov. 1958, 12. Jg., Heft 11, p. 1002.

Max Frisch shared in the "Reaktion" and presented his views on culture in his first works for the stage.

At this point, one may well question how and why Max Frisch, a Swiss, became embroiled in what appears to be a private German cultural debate. It is fair to say that the precarious and somewhat unique position of his homeland in the geographical and political map of Europe is a factor in his involvement. Switzerland, a linguistically and culturally divided nation, has always lived in the shadow of its giant neighbour to the north. Frisch, a German-speaking Swiss, overwhelmed, as it were, by the magnitude of the German cultural heritage, is not able to obliterate his emotional and spiritual attachment to the 'fatherland':

Wenn Menschen, die eine gleiche Erziehung genossen haben wie ich, die gleiche Worte sprechen wie ich und gleiche Bücher, gleiche Musik, gleiche Gemälde lieben wie ich-wenn diese Menschen keineswegs gesichert sind vor der Möglichkeit, Unmenschen zu werden und Dinge zu tun, die wir den Menschen unsrer Zeit, ausgenommen die pathologischen Einzelfälle, vorher nicht hätten zutrauen können, woher nehme ich die Zuversicht, daß ich davor gesichert sei?<sup>15</sup>

Frisch indicates here that until the Nazi extermination of the Jews, he himself had always assumed that people of cultural refinement could not turn into barbarians. Consequently, he, as a Swiss member of the German cultural community, experienced a deep personal shock. He therefore claims that the German tragedy of the 30's and 40's is also a Swiss tragedy, and will not allow the traditional neutrality of Switzerland to absolve his compatriots completely from responsibility for the German situation. Even as late as 1968 he reiterates this conviction. "Was beispielsweise die 'unversuchten Schweizer' angeht,

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<sup>15</sup>Tagebuch, p. 240.



habe ich nie die Meinung vertreten, daß wir 'unschuldig' seien."<sup>16</sup>

Frisch does concede, however, that there exists a decided difference between the Swiss interpretation of "Kultur" and that of the Germans:

In der Tat empfinden wir, was den Begriff der Kultur angeht, einen wesentlichen Unterschied zwischen dem deutschen und dem schweizerischen Denken. Das allenthalben unerläßliche Gefühl, Kultur zu haben, beziehen wir kaum aus der Tatsache, daß wir Künstler haben ... Unter Kultur zählen wir wohl in erster Linie die staatsbürgerlichen Leistungen, unsere gemeinschaftliche Haltung mehr als das künstlerische oder wissenschaftliche Meisterwerk eines einzelnen Staatsbürger.<sup>17</sup>

Paradoxical as it may seem, Frisch does not regard this as a basis for Swiss pride, since he feels it stems from an obvious feeling of inferiority in the artistic field. He claims that the existing attitude to "Kultur" in Switzerland stems from a feeling of inferiority towards the Germans, since Swiss influence on the fine arts has been admittedly negligible. It is an attitude common to small countries, called by Frisch: "Armut an Begeisterung" (Stiller, Fischer Bücherei, 186).

In his article "Max Frisch: 'Andorra' und die Entscheidung" Karl Schmid points out a subtle contradiction in Frisch's criticism of the Swiss concept of "Kultur". He accuses Frisch of reasoning in an uncompromising manner purely for the purpose of furthering his own incessant exposé of the Swiss mentality and society:

Er erkennt die Gefahren der 'voreiligen Metaphysik' in der ästhetischen Kultur, zum Beispiel der deutschen, die auf 'Höhe' tendiert und nicht auf Tragkraft, und merkt genau, daß der Kleinstaat in seiner ganzen Unansehnlichkeit den schätzenswerten Vorzug bietet, keine Alibis durch die Kultur zu

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<sup>16</sup>Frankfurter Hefte, No. 29, 1968, p. 127.

<sup>17</sup>Öffentlichkeit als Partner (Frankfurt a. M., 1967), p.22.

gestatten. Das hindert ihn nun aber eben nicht, den Schweizern im Handkehrum ihren Mangel an Größe vorzuwerfen.<sup>18</sup>

Schmid argues that Frisch is unfair to the Swiss in his refusal to recognize at least a degree of merit in their approach to cultural matters. He also insists that it is illogical to find fault with two opposing viewpoints at the same time:

Es geht aber wohl nicht an, der deutschen Kultur ihre einsamen Aufgipfelungen anzukreiden und gleichzeitig der schweizerischen Kultur ihre kollektive Moderiertheit.<sup>19</sup>

Schmid goes on to criticize Frisch for presenting in his works a biased picture of his homeland. The relationship between Frisch and Switzerland has been studied intensively by a number of critics and will be mentioned in more detail in my discussion of his individual plays.

Although Frisch is cognizant of the intrinsic differences in the accepted Swiss and German interpretations of "Kultur", he still maintains that in matters of art, literature and music, the Swiss educated elite continue to feel a close affinity to and harbour a personal affection for the German masters. He tells us that "... vor allem die Gebildeten, ziehen sich auf die Klassik zurück, wo sie die Verwandtschaft mit dem Deutschtum nicht stört ..."<sup>20</sup> In other words, although a cultural rift does exist in the post-war years between Switzerland and Germany, a rift caused by politics and not real cultural differences, the picture of a German-Swiss cultural community remains

<sup>18</sup>Unbehagen im Kleinstaat. (Zürich, 1968), p. 185.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 186.

<sup>20</sup>Öffentlichkeit als Partner, p. 16.

intact in the "deutscher Klassik". There were in this era--as far as we know--no official anti-semitic policies to distort and upset this cultural unit. On the other hand, many of these Swiss intellectuals who looked up to the German masters adopted a disdainful, contemptuous, superior attitude to the Germans during and after World War II. This attitude was not based on cultural issues, but on political differences, and was therefore ridiculed by Frisch. He realized that these people were confusing the issues--"Kultur" and "Politik". He viewed this renewed rise of Swiss national pride as a front, as a means of obscuring the fact that Switzerland was a part of the great German cultural heritage and therefore could not remain blameless for the events of 1939-1945.

The total collapse of the German nation during the Nazi era prompted Frisch to reassess personally the meaning and purpose of "Kultur". This neighbouring country, once the acclaimed master in most intellectual and cultural spheres, now lay in complete ruins, after a period of monstrous savagery and unrestrained destruction. The breakdown of the German nation startled post-war intellectuals into an immediate attempt to uncover the causes.

In 1945, Max Frisch was virtually unknown in literary circles. Although he was working as a correspondent and contributor to several journals and newspapers in Switzerland,<sup>21</sup> he had yet to write his first plays and major prose works which would later bring him international

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<sup>21</sup>For a complete list of his early journalistic articles see Elly Wilbert-Collins, A Bibliography of Four Contemporary German-Swiss Authors (Berlin, 1967), pp. 33-39.

recognition. In fact, he was then leading a double life, as journalist and architect, and was better known in his own country at that time for his architectural achievements than for his literary talents.<sup>22</sup> The German disaster moved and disturbed him deeply, and was the prime motivation for his first dramatic efforts: Nun singen sie wieder, (1945) Die Chinesische Mauer, (1946) and Als der Krieg zu Ende war, (1949). More subtle allusions to the 1939-45 war developments can also be found in his works of the next two decades. Frisch's interest in Germany's then recent history is not politically or economically oriented; it is confined to more personal matters: the role which the intellectual and creative artist played during those years of Nazi rule. He was also giving considerable thought to the responsibility of the individual for the atrocities which were committed against mankind.

In the light of the events which had occurred in Europe under Nazi tyranny, Frisch could no longer condone the division between art and real experience, between culture and politics. He writes in his Tagebuch in 1948, after a post-war visit to many areas of the devastated German territory:

Was hat, so sagt man, Kunst mit Politik zu tun? Und unter Politik ... versteht man schlechterdings das Niedrige, das Ordinäre, das Alltägliche, womit sich der geistige Mensch, der glorreiche Kulturträger, nicht beschmutzen soll. Der Kulturträger, der Kulturschaffende. Es ist immer wieder auffällig, wieviele deutsche Menschen (besonders deutsche) unablässig besorgt sind, geistige Menschen zu sein; vor allem, wie sie besorgt sind; indem sie von Literatur, von Musik, von Philosophie sprechen. Und Schluß. Auffällig

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<sup>22</sup>In 1940 he was awarded First Prize in an architectural contest for his design of an outdoor swimming-pool and recreation pavilion in the Zurich suburb of Letzigraben.

ist die Angst, ein Spießer zu sein. ...<sup>23</sup>  
 Die Heidenangst, ein Spießer zu sein, und das Mißverständnis,  
 das darin schon enthalten ist, die Bemühtheit, sich in den  
 Sphären des Ewigen anzusiedeln, um auf der Erde nicht verant-  
 wortlich zu sein, die tausend Unarten voreiliger Metaphysik, ob  
 das für die Kultur nicht gefährlicher ist als alle Spießer  
 zusammen?<sup>24</sup>

In his plays of the immediate post-war years, Frisch creates characters who embody this cultural propensity. Figures like the school teacher in Nun singen sie wieder and the pianist Halske in Als der Krieg zu Ende war merely talk about culture and prove their moral cowardice in their passivity and indifference to politics. The modern academic also appears in Frisch's plays as an extension of his critique of the aesthetic individual. Die Chinesische Mauer and Biedermann und die Brandstifter (1958) exemplify this mistrust of the man of learning.

Frisch was not alone in his disillusion. The role of the artist-intellectual came under scrutiny and continual attack after the fall of the Third Reich. It was the concern of numerous intellectuals: painters, writers, philosophers and musicians, who were anxious to influence public opinion. As early as December 16, 1944, Heimito von Doderer, the Austrian novelist, writing in Tangenten, a diary he kept from 1940 to 1950, indicates that he shares the same pessimism that Frisch expresses in his Tagebuch four years later:

Das ist es - nämlich die Abgestorbenheit des unbewußten Denkens - was den Kulturbetrieb der neueren Deutschen so widerwärtig macht: diese wohlmeinende Zustimmung aus der Helle des Bewußtseins, dieser optimistische Besitzer-Ton in Bezug auf die sogenannten Kulturgüter, diese wertende Auffassung und Konstatierung, welche den Geist eben doch für Nützliches hält, diese Aufgeschlossenheit ohne Ergriffenheit

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<sup>23</sup>Tagebuch, p. 241.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 243.

oder Erschütterung, der selbe befremdliche Eindruck etwa, den ein großes Haus machen würde, das mit offenen Türen und Fenstern sauber und blank an der Straße stünde - und innen völlig leer: wo doch hier einzig Verwahrlosung die natürliche Oberfläche solch eines Sachverhalts bilden könnte, keinesfalls aber das korrekt inventarisierte Nichts.<sup>25</sup>

The tone and content of this short excerpt are similar indeed to excerpts from Frisch's Tagebuch and later speeches. Doderer, like Frisch, does not denounce outright the value of artistic and intellectual activity, but attempts to place them in their proper perspective. He calls for an examination of what man is capable of achieving and what man is. Germany's pre-eminence in matters of cultural contribution is not disputed. Both Frisch and Doderer attempt to relate culture to social and political activity, to all spheres of human endeavour. Frisch believed that the gulf between real and ideal experience had been a ministrant factor in the decline and collapse of the German nation, and it became a recurring theme in his dramas of the forties.

His view of the creative artist as a socially and morally responsible individual is constant throughout the next two decades. In three published speeches: "Büchner-Rede" (1958), "Öffentlichkeit als Partner" (1958), and "Der Autor und das Theater" (1964) Frisch clearly states his convictions:

Daß ein Mensch, der sich etwa darauf hinausredet, als Künstler ein unpolitischer Mensch zu sein, wenn er, um seine Karriere zu sichern, sich mit Verbrechern verbrüderet, keinem moralischen Urteil unterstehe, das ist nicht gemeint, wenn ich meine, das Kunstwerk möchte als Kunstwerk beurteilt werden, also nach dem Grad seiner Gestaltung, denn daß das Kunstwerk als Kunstwerk

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<sup>25</sup>Tangenten. Tagebuch eines Schriftstellers, 1940-1950.  
(Munich and Vienna, 1964), p. 261.

besteht, ändert ja wiederum nichts daran, daß der Verfasser, wenn er sich als Staatsbürger vergeht, von der Gesellschaft zu richten ist. Talent ist kein moralisches Alibi für den Menschen, der es hat.<sup>26</sup>

More than a decade after the termination of Nazi control in Europe, Frisch demonstrates in this speech that he is still concerned about the position taken by many artists and intellectuals during that period. Although most German artists claimed to be non-political, many fraternized with members of the Nazi party thereby forfeiting their artistic autonomy, and making themselves accomplices to the Nazi crimes against humanity. This excerpt from his 1958 speech reminds us of similar thoughts expressed in "Kultur als Alibi" nine years earlier. Frisch stresses again in this speech, delivered in Frankfurt, that an artist should not be treated as a special member of society, that his actions should be judged by that society; should an artist commit a criminal offence, then he must be sentenced by law. His artistic accomplishments must not be allowed to influence the verdict.

Six years later, again in Frankfurt, Frisch speaks of the artist's responsibility to his public and also the relationship between the theatre and politics.<sup>27</sup> His views have changed little in two decades. He insists in the 1960's, as he did in the 1940's, that an artist must be concerned with politics, not primarily because he is an artist, but because he is a member of a social-political unit. The theatre in particular, Frisch maintains, can be a powerful political

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<sup>26</sup>"Öffentlichkeit als Partner", Öffentlichkeit als Partner, pp. 61-62.

<sup>27</sup>"Der Autor und das Theater", Öffentlichkeit als Partner, pp. 68-89.

force, and consequently the playwright should be mindful of the influence his works can have on the public:

... Wenn ich in der Beleuchter-Loge sitze und die Gesichter im Parkett sehe, bin ich doch nicht mehr sicher, daß wir in unsrer Arbeit verantwortungsfrei sind: ... Also glaube ich plötzlich doch, daß das Theater so etwas wie eine politische Funktion habe?—ich glaube, das ist kein Postulat, sondern eine Wahrnehmung: sozusagen von der Beleuchter-Loge aus; eine Erfahrung, die dann auch am Schreibtisch nicht mehr ganz zu vergessen ist. Ich spreche als Stückschreiber; selbstverständlich gilt es auch für Regisseur und Schauspieler. Ich kenne niemand, der Regisseur oder Schauspieler geworden ist aus Verantwortung gegenüber der Gesellschaft. Indem er es aber geworden ist, hat Verantwortung ihn eingeholt, denke ich, nicht anders als den Stückschreiber, und wir haben von einer verantwortlichen oder unverantwortlichen Darstellung zu sprechen. Ich meine jetzt nicht die Verantwortung gegenüber dem Werk, die Kunst-Verantwortung, sondern die gesellschaftliche.<sup>28</sup>

Frisch, however, does not seem to consider that this point of view carried to the extreme can, in the end, damage a playwright's work. The theatre could easily become almost another political institution, as has been the recent trend, particularly with playwrights such as Peter Weiss and Rolf Hochhuth. Admittedly, Frisch's political commitment is more pronounced in his early post-war plays because he was then still suffering from the shock of the Nazi era; yet even after he has managed to free himself, to a degree, from this serious commitment in his hilarious play Biedermann und die Brandstifter (1958), his conscious 'engagement' becomes evident again in Andorra (1961).

"Kultur", "Kunst" and "Theater" and their relationship to morality is a recurring theme with Frisch, and one which adumbrates his whole philosophy of a reinvigorated and functional humanism, a

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<sup>28</sup>Öffentlichkeit als Partner, p. 85.



humanism which practices what it preaches. Frisch supports a humanism devoted to promoting moral and humane behavior, rather than scholarly research and intellectual meditation. He believes that our value system has become distorted, that society has made little moral progress, but offers a solution to this dilemma, not in a Rousseauian return to primitive life or a Nietzschean "Übermensch", but in man himself. Frisch gives us in his work a sober appraisal of man's potential compared with man's present condition. He penetrates the depths of his characters' personalities in an effort to understand their sometimes inconsistent behavior. The disparity between moral and cultural values which Frisch exposed is incarnated in the person of Heydrich, a cultured Nazi officer to whom Frisch alludes in his Tagebuch:

Ich denke an Heydrich, der Mozart spielte; ... Gerade das deutsche Volk, dem es nie an Talenten fehlte und an Geistern, die sich der Forderung des gemeinen Tages enthoben fühlten, lieferte die meisten oder mindestens die ersten Barbaren unseres Jahrhunderts.<sup>29</sup>

The figure of the cultured barbarian appears in his first war-play Nun singen sie wieder as Herbert, but the theme of the division between morals and culture is less subtly woven into a number of his subsequent plays.

Frisch's sincere concern for his fellow man prods him to his relentless exposé of man's true nature, as exhibited by man's outward behavior. Here he makes the distinction between a cultured and uncultured individual. He tells us in his Tagebuch that culture manifests itself "... nicht allein auf dem Bücherschrank und am Flügel, sondern

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<sup>29</sup>Tagebuch, p. 89.

ebensosehr in der Art, wie man seine Untergebenen behandelt."<sup>30</sup> This is the criterion he uses to evaluate individuals and to determine whether or not they are really cultured. Only in this all-embracing context of human endeavour does Frisch recognize the significance and value of "Kultur."

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<sup>30</sup>Tagebuch, p. 127.

## Chapter II

Nun singen sie wieder

## INTRODUCTION TO CHAPTER II

Several critics have noted similarities between Thornton Wilder's play Our Town and Max Frisch's Nun singen sie wieder. Theodore Ziolkowski remarks that "this play ...structurally owes much to the American playwright".<sup>1</sup> Both Hans Bänziger<sup>2</sup> and Ulrich Weisstein<sup>3</sup> draw comparisons between the endings of the two, but to my knowledge, no one has yet noticed that a very important issue which lies at the core of Nun singen sie wieder, the interpretation of culture, is also present, as a side issue, in the American play.

In Act I, when a lady from the audience asks Mr. Webb, a character in the play, the following question about his fictional hometown:

... is there any culture or love of beauty in Grover's Corners?<sup>4</sup>  
the reply received is:

Well, ma'am there ain't much - not in the sense you mean.<sup>5</sup>  
The lady obviously wished to know if the members of this rural community were acquainted with the fine arts. That is her interpretation of

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<sup>1</sup>Theodore Ziolkowski, "Max Frisch: Moralist without a Moral", Yale French Studies, vol. XXIX, 1962, p. 134.

<sup>2</sup>Hans Bänziger, Frisch und Dürrenmatt (Bern, 1960), p. 62.

<sup>3</sup>Ulrich Weisstein, Max Frisch (New York, 1967), p. 106.

<sup>4</sup>Thornton Wilder, Three Plays (New York, 1957), p.25.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 25.

culture, which does not include other activities such as the appreciation and observation of natural phenomena, which does exist in the town, so we are told by Mr. Webb. As for sophisticated culture:

Robinson Crusoe and the Bible; and Handel's 'Largo', we all know that; and Whistler's 'Mother' - those are just about as far as we go.<sup>6</sup>

All three of the traditional art forms are mentioned in this short statement: literature, music and painting. Mr. Webb realizes that these are the things one usually associates with the word culture and also realizes that he has supplied a disappointing answer to the lady's question. Here the matter ends in Wilder's play. Frisch, on the other hand, creates a play around the question of culture and its meaning in twentieth century life. His views on this subject have already been analyzed in the previous chapter. Now we will see how he transforms these thoughts into dramatic content.

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<sup>6</sup>Thornton Wilder, Three Plays (New York, 1957), p. 25.

Nun singen sie wieder

Nun singen sie wieder was written in January, 1945 and performed for the first time at the Zürcher Schauspielhaus on March 29, 1945, under the direction of Kurt Horwitz. Frisch labels it "Versuch eines Requiems", basing the play on war atrocities which were then in the immediate past. In his "Vorwort" to this play, Frisch denies the obvious, that he intends to draw his public's attention to the realities of the war years:

Denn es muß der Eindruck eines Spieles durchaus bewahrt bleiben, so daß keiner es am wirklichen Geschehen vergleichen wird, das ungeheuer ist.<sup>7</sup>

It was unrealistic of him to expect an audience not to draw historical comparisons, especially in 1945, when the Nazi horrors were still very fresh in memory. It was the wrong time for experimentation in theatrical objectivity, a fact which the inexperienced playwright soon came to realize. Frisch's personal interest in culture and its relationship to morality, coupled with his theatrical inexperience, produced a play which is an obvious mirror of his own sentiment. Later, he openly admits his personal involvement in the thematic material of Nun singen sie wieder in the first of three letters written to a young German officer who had questioned Frisch's right as a Swiss to pass comment on war events not personally experienced by him. Frisch's replies were never sent, but were published in part in an article entitled: "Über Zeitereignis und Dichtung" (Neue Zürcher Zeitung, Nos. 502/504, 1945) and in full in his Tagebuch:

...das Stück (Nun singen sie wieder) ist ... entstanden, ... aus dem Bedürfnis, eine eigene Bedrängnis loszuwerden.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Stücke I, p. 394.

<sup>8</sup>Tagebuch, p. 111.

In these letters Frisch attempts to soothe the angered reactions of many Germans to his play. He explains that he is not advising or judging them, but cannot, as a Swiss writer, and as a thinking person, allow events of the war to pass uncommented. He also states that perhaps he, a Swiss, is able to view the circumstances of the war from a more objective viewpoint, as he personally was not exposed to suffering and hardships. These personal experiences tend to colour one's opinions and reactions, thereby producing emotional outbursts, not rational assessments of the more generalized issues. He makes this clear in the third and last letter. The Swiss, he claims "hatten sogar, was die Kriegsländer nicht haben: nämlich den zwiefachen Anblick. Der Kämpfende kann die Szene nur sehen, solange er selber dabei ist; der Zuschauer sieht sie immerfort."<sup>9</sup>

In the first scene we hear of the massacre of twenty-one hostages which was ordered by the military officer, Herbert, and carried out by Karl, a soldier. A priest of the Greek Orthodox church has been given the task of burying the bodies. While he is busy filling in the graves, Karl and Herbert discuss the executions and Karl's approaching furlough in the spring. With mention of the coming spring, both are reminded of Eduard Mörike's poem "Er ist's", and show they have learned it by heart. This juxtaposition of poetry recitation and the execution of twenty-one hostages demonstrates in the first moments of the play the paradox which Frisch saw in the concept of culture held by many Germans. Both Herbert and Karl have been taught to appreciate the beauty

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 115.



of poetry, but this sensitivity does not extend to an appreciation of human life. It was this obvious dichotomy which troubled Frisch and which motivated him to write the play. He intends to show us that it is possible for a lover of art, music and literature also to be a murderer. This he claims was the case in the Second World War, as we have already noted from passages in his Tagebuch, in particular the passage about the cellist, Heydrich, quoted at the end of the previous chapter. We learn later, in the third scene, that Herbert is also an accomplished cellist, a deliberate allusion by Frisch to a historical character:

Der Funker: Ich habe einen Menschen gekannt, der spielte solche Musik, wunderbar. ... Er redete über solche Musik, daß unsereiner nur staunen konnte, so klug, so edel, so innerlich. ... Und doch ist er der gleiche Mensch, der Hunderte von Geiseln erschießt, Frauen und Kinder verbrennt – genau der gleiche, so wie er Cello spielt, so innerlich ... Herbert hat er geheißten.<sup>10</sup>

Frisch again refers to Heydrich when replying to an anonymous critic, simply called Bi, who had attacked the message of Nun singen sie wieder in the Neue Zürcher Zeitung on May 5, 1945. The impact of Heydrich's seemingly paradoxical personality, as murderer and musician, on Frisch is very apparent in the figure of Herbert. In this article Frisch writes:

Nicht wenige von uns hielten sich lange an den tröstlichen Irrtum, es handle sich um zweierlei Menschen dieses Volkes, solche, die Mozart spielen, und solche, die Menschen verbrennen. Zu erfahren, daß sich beide in der gleichen Person befinden können, das war die eigentliche Erschütterung; es erschüttert das Vertrauen gegenüber jedem einzelnen, auch wenn

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<sup>10</sup>Stücke I, pp. 102-103.

er Mozart spielt, auch wenn er Mörike liebt wie wir.<sup>11</sup>

This "Erschütterung" which Frisch experienced was of course mostly the immediate result of his own personal beliefs. Before the war, he, among many others, felt assured that culture could provide a bulwark against barbarism. Auschwitz, therefore, was a sudden and startling shock. Today, however, we have come to terms with such horrors and consequently our reactions are not nearly as intensified as Frisch's were in 1946. We now accept, without shock or question, that highly educated and talented individuals can and often do commit barbaric actions. This duality of behavior is analyzed in detail by Michael Hamburger in his book From Prophecy to Exorcism in the chapter entitled "De-Demonization".<sup>12</sup> He includes Frisch in a list of authors who, in his opinion, most successfully portray in their works the 'banality of evil' exhibited by not only the German officials during war-time but also by millions of ordinary men.

Returning to the play, we find Herbert inquiring of Karl if he had noticed an ancient religious fresco in one of the churches which they had passed through during their recent attack. The artistic beauty of this Byzantine fresco has made an indelible impression on Herbert, while at the same time, he remains completely insensitive to his own barbarous actions. While he is reminiscing on the details of the religious mural, we are introduced through Herbert to another

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<sup>11</sup>Max Frisch, "Verdammen oder Verzeihen", Neue Schweizer Rundschau, N. F. 13, 1945/46, p. 121.

<sup>12</sup>Michael Hamburger, From Prophecy to Exorcism (London, 1965), pp. 144-145.

figure who has an essential role to play in Nun singen sie wieder, the school teacher, Karl's father. He is responsible for instilling in both his son and Herbert the love of beauty as revealed in literature, music and painting. Herbert wishes that his former teacher could be with them on the battlefield to give a lecture on the beauty of the fresco:

Unser Oberlehrer, wenn er das sehen könnte, ... Und einen Vortrag würde er halten: Alle diese Gestalten, würde er sagen, ... sie stehen vor dem unbedingten Raume des Geistes - Ich muß an unseren Oberlehrer denken. ... was seine Bildung dazu sagen würde ... Er hat ja immer nur über das Schöne gesprochen.<sup>13</sup>

The school teacher eventually hears about the impression which the fresco has made on Herbert, his former pupil. Herbert describes it in a letter to his sister Liesel written while he is still on the front. This is the only news of her brother which Liesel gives the school teacher, implying that it is perhaps the only matter which would interest him, a man of learning and intellect:

Oberlehrer: Wie geht es Herbert?

Liesel: Mein Bruder ist an der Front. Zurzeit sind sie in einem Kloster, schreibt er, da gebe es mittelalterliche Fresken: unser Oberlehrer würde staunen, schreibt er.<sup>14</sup>

The school teacher reacts to this comment saying:

Herbert ist mein bester Schüler gewesen.<sup>15</sup>

He is proud as a former teacher of Herbert that he has successfully communicated his knowledge and appreciation of art to at least one of

<sup>13</sup>Stücke I, pp. 89-90.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 97.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 97.

his students, proud that his efforts in the class-room have not been completely in vain. In the midst of war suffering, and having just learned of the death of his wife, this man can still marvel at the positive creative ability of mankind, without reflection on the misery around him also produced by man. In essence, the school teacher lives in two spheres of reality which will always remain separate.

Liesel has been affected too by the school teacher's learning and tells us of the kind of education the children placed in his care have received:

Liesel: Sie haben uns durch die alte Stadt geführt, durch die Schlösser und Galerien, Sie haben uns die Bilder erklärt, daß man es nicht mehr vergißt, was Sie nur alles über so ein berühmtes altes Gemälde sagen können! Sie haben uns die Augen geschenkt für das Schöne, wissen Sie, für das Edle und so.<sup>16</sup>

Such expressions as "das Schöne" and "das Edle" from the lips of Liesel ring empty. These are the platitudes which she has learned from the school teacher, and which she bandies, exposing her own superficiality. Frisch shows us the shallowness of this kind of education which stresses the ideal and the beautiful in isolated contexts, without consideration for their relevance. In Frisch's eyes, the school teacher is responsible for the sterile aestheticism with which his students were imbued.

Frisch has purposely not given the school teacher a name. Instead, he intends him to typify his profession, particularly with respect to Germany. He represents not only the teaching profession, but stands for intellectuals in general, who, Frisch feels, often lack

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<sup>16</sup>Stücke I, p. 97.

the moral fibre to exemplify in their own lives the values and ideals which they hold in high esteem:

Das Unverbindliche zwischen Innenleben und öffentlicher Wirklichkeit, das ist die Mitschuld des Oberlehrers. <sup>17</sup>

Later Frisch admits that he is attacking a German character trait in particular:

... der Oberlehrer, ist mir in den letzten Wochen, da wir als Soldaten an der Grenze waren und mit vielen Deutschen redeten, erschreckend oft begegnet; das deutsche Gefühl der Unschuld, die deutsche Hybris, die sich als harmloses Staunen gibt, warum die Welt am deutschen Wesen nicht genesen will, die Ausflucht ins Unverbindlich-Gemüthafte, das alles sind Dinge, die wir, ... oft an jenen Deutschen gewahren müssen, die sich als die anständigen und die schuldlosen betrachten. <sup>18</sup>

These words recall a remark made by the school teacher when asked by his daughter-in-law, Maria, why there should be so much suffering and misery in the world. He replies:

Sie ertragen es nicht, daß wir die Welt verbessern wollen, daß wir die Welt verbessern könnten. <sup>19</sup>

All blame is therefore placed on the enemy, allowing the school teacher and others like him to indulge in the self-righteous contemplation of "das Schöne" and "das Edle".

When Herbert returns from military duty on the front, from mass murdering and plundering, he is at last aware that all his education has taught him nothing about life's realities, that it was simply knowledge obtained in a vacuum, totally unrelated to actual conditions

<sup>17</sup>Max Frisch, "Verdammen oder Verzeihen", Neue Schweizer Rundschau, N. F. 13, 1945/46, p. 122.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 122.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 96.

in the world around him.

... es war ein Schwindel, was man uns lehrte.<sup>20</sup>

All that had been taught him in the classroom is now shown to be sterile, and he places the blame for his inadequate education on his former school teacher, whom he sentences to death. By having the teacher shot, Herbert revenges himself not only against the individual responsible for his own insufficient knowledge and distorted values, but also against the whole traditional approach to learning which propounds theory, absolutes and ideology at the expense of the human being.<sup>21</sup> In his education, there had been no emphasis on the importance of understanding and respecting one's fellow men, although the teacher claimed to be a supporter of humanism. Shortly before he has his former teacher shot, Herbert rebukes him with these words:

Sie wollten den Menschen nicht kennen, ich weiß! Humanismus nennen Sie das- ... Wir erschießen nicht Sie allein, sondern Ihre Worte, Ihr Denken, alles was Sie als Geist bezeichnen, Ihre

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<sup>20</sup>Stücke I, p. 142.

<sup>21</sup>Treason against the state is also not completely dismissed as a reason for the school teacher's execution. At the end of the third scene, while hiding in the cellar during an air raid, the school master is heard to remark: "Auch unsere machen das gleiche" (Stücke I, p. 118). These are, of course, treasonable words in war time, as is made clear by the officer in attendance. "Wer hat das gesagt? Ein Feigling, der sich nicht meldet, ein Verräter, der an die Wand käme, wenn er sich melden würde" (Stücke I, p. 118). The school teacher admits that he is the guilty party, being fully aware of the consequences of his confession. There are, therefore, two possible reasons for the execution of the teacher built into the play: the conventional military one, treason, and one on which the audience is required to reflect - the betrayal in the classroom of the humanistic ideal.

Träume, Ihre Ziele, Ihre Anschauung der Welt, die, wie Sie sehen, eine Lüge war.<sup>22</sup>

Herbert, a prize student in the pre-war years, renounces outright the fundamentals of his education. They now appear totally irrelevant and have in no way contributed to his understanding of his own actions or the actions of others. He has seen two supposedly educated and cultured men compromise their beliefs to protect themselves from bodily harm. The priest on the battle front is willing to swear that he has no knowledge of the execution of the hostages whom he has just buried. The church, the traditional representative of the humanistic ethic, is exposed by Frisch, and shown to be a traitor to its own teachings.<sup>23</sup> The school teacher, representing the artistic and intellectual class, proves to be a moral coward when the principles which he teaches in the class room are put to a practical test. Herbert reminds him:

Erinnern Sie sich an den Morgen, als wir in das Lehrerzimmer kamen, es ging um die Freiheit des Geistes, die Sie uns lehrten; wir brachten das Lehrbuch und sagten Ihnen: diese und diese Herren wollen wir nicht. Wir drohten Ihnen, ja. Wir rissen die Seiten heraus, die uns nicht recht geben wollten, vor Ihren Augen. Und was taten Sie?<sup>24</sup>

The school teacher attempts to protect himself, saying:

„Ich konnte mich nicht wehren. ... Ich hatte eine Familie, damals noch.“<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Stücke I, pp. 140-141.

<sup>23</sup>Adelheid Weise, Untersuchungen zur Thematik und Struktur der Dramen von Max Frisch. (Göppingen, 1970), p. 32. We do see the ghost of the priest performing his church duties in the after-life, but this is merely ritual, an attempt to retain the outer trappings of religion. He has already shown that his faith is weak.

<sup>24</sup>Stücke I, p. 142.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 142.

Herbert retorts with the following:

Sie nennen es Familie, wir nennen es Feigheit, was zum Vorschein kam. Sie haben den Mut bewundert in den Versen unserer Dichter, ja, und ich selber bin es gewesen, der diese alberne Sache ins Rollen brachte, damals, ich wollte meinen Kameraden zeigen, wie es sich verhalte mit dem Geist, ... Und wie verhielt es sich? Der Geist gab nach, wir klopfen dran, und es war hohl. Das war die Enttäuschung!<sup>26</sup>

Dissatisfaction with all the ideas and concepts taught in the classroom produces in Herbert an eventual nihilistic approach to life. In denying the very existence of "Geist", he becomes a Nietzsche-like figure who replaces "Geist" with a reliance on strength and power:

Wir griffen zur Macht, zur letzten Gewalt, damit der Geist uns begegne, der wirkliche; aber der Spötter hat Recht, es gibt keinen wirklichen Geist, und wir haben die Welt in der Tasche, ... ich sehe keine Grenze unserer Macht - das ist die Verzweiflung.<sup>27</sup>

Der Verbrecher, wie Sie mich nennen, er ist dem Geiste näher, er fordert ihn durch die Gewalt heraus, er ist ihm näher als der Oberlehrer, der vom Geist redet und lügt ...<sup>28</sup>

Ich werde töten, bis der Geist aus seinem Dunkel tritt, wenn es ihn gibt, und bis der Geist mich selber bezwingt.<sup>29</sup>

The dead morality of culture with which he had been indoctrinated in his youth is now replaced by his own value system, which is a return to the law of the jungle. Herbert appears to believe that man's primitive nature, the desire to kill before being killed, has not been nullified by the development of the mind, but simply obscured. Morally, man has not progressed past the primitive state; his animal instincts

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<sup>26</sup>Stücke I, p. 142.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 91.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 142.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 142.



have not been subjugated. With this newly gained knowledge, Herbert sets out on a campaign for life governed by power and violence, defying all hitherto accepted moral values. He is the only major character in the play who manages to survive the war; - an alarming outcome, but a realistic appraisal of a totally decadent and ineffective value system. Adelheid Weise gives the following perceptive synopsis of Herbert's role in the play:

In der Person Herberts gestaltet Max Frisch die schon von Nietzsche aufgestellte These, daß der Nihilismus eine Folge des Versagens der abendländischen Kultur sei und daß der 'Wille zur Macht' eine Antwort auf die erwiesene Wertlosigkeit der geistigen Tradition darstelle. In der Hinrichtung des Oberlehrers durch Herbert wird die Vernichtung des abendländischen Humanismus ... zum Ausdruck gebracht.<sup>30</sup>

Karl, the son of the school teacher, and an accomplice to the mass murders ordered by Herbert, succumbs to his sense of guilt. Despairing, he deserts and returns home to commit suicide. Confronted by his father while hiding in the cellar of his home, Karl states how deeply demoralized he has become because of his actions on the front. Karl's father tries to find excuses for his son. He assures Karl that he should not harbour this sense of guilt for his actions were the result of military orders. Therefore, the responsibility for the executions is not his:

Es ist nicht deine Schuld, Karl, was alles auch befohlen wird, es ist nicht unsere Schuld - <sup>31</sup>

Karl cannot accept this explanation. He attempts to show his father that this attitude is morally wrong, that each individual must assume responsibility for his own actions.

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<sup>30</sup>Adelheid Weise, Untersuchungen, etc., p. 34.

<sup>31</sup>Stücke I, p. 113.

Nichts befreit uns von der Verantwortung, nichts, sie ist uns gegeben, jedem von uns, jedem die seine; man kann nicht seine Verantwortung einem anderen geben, damit er sie verwalte. Man kann die Last der persönlichen Freiheit nicht abtreten - und eben das haben wir versucht, und eben das ist unsere Schuld.<sup>32</sup>

Karl is here the mouth-piece of Frisch's own views on what were the excuses of Nazi war criminals when prosecuted after the Second World War. Karl condemns his father for his failure to recognize that each and every individual does bear some degree of responsibility for the collective well-being of his fellow men. To praise the courage and other virtues of legendary heroes depicted in literature is not enough. This is not true humanism, merely a thin veneer of pseudo-intellectualism hiding inner weakness and cowardice. In the past, the school teacher had compromised his own moral principles in the face of established authority, as is exposed in the conversation with Herbert previously mentioned. Here he also attempts to excuse his actions, explaining to his son that the compromise he made was not a selfish one, but was necessary to assure the safety of his own family:

Euch zuliebe habe ich es getan, Mutter zuliebe, dir zuliebe!  
Ich hatte damals die Wahl, ich konnte Oberlehrer oder brotlos werden, brotlos, arbeitslos, mittellos.<sup>33</sup>

This explanation does not convince Karl. He hangs himself without further discussion of the matter, unable to continue living in a world which is governed by cowardice and inhumanity. Adelheid Weise interprets his convictions and actions from an existentialist viewpoint, claiming:

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<sup>32</sup>Stücke I, p. 113.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 112.

Karls Weltanschauung vereint durch den Glauben an die sittliche Verantwortung des Menschen und die Liebe zum Nächsten die humanistischen und die christlichen Traditionen des Abendlandes und setzt sie ... in Beziehung zur Wirklichkeit des 20. Jahrhunderts. ... Weder die bloße Proklamation der Werte des Humanismus noch die des Christentums können sich gegenüber der Gewalt behaupten, weil beiden Geisteshaltungen der Glaube an eine absolute Wahrheit zugrunde liegt. In der absurden Wirklichkeit des 20. Jahrhunderts versagen sie. ... In der Gestalt Karls verkörpert Max Frisch eine existentialistische Weltanschauung, die auf die Selbstverantwortlichkeit des Menschen und seiner Solidarität gegenüber dem Mitmenschen gegründet ist.<sup>34</sup>

From this explanation, it appears that Miss Weise's definition of an existentialist approach to life is similar to Frisch's concept of humanism.

Writing as a Swiss viewing the events of the war years from a neutral position, Frisch does not direct all his attention to the German side, but mirrors also the behavior and attitudes of non-Germans. These appear as minor characters, but play an essential role.

In the third scene, the conversations of the allied pilots demonstrate that the false concept of culture is not purely a German problem. The radio-operator cannot tolerate listening to the music of Bach (St. Matthew's Passion) while he and his compatriots are awaiting orders for another night raid. He is unable to recognize any merit in such music, claiming that the beauty and serenity inherent in musical compositions give one false faith in the beauty of the world. Music, he claims, allows man to conjure up in his own mind a deceptive illusion of the true nature of existence, which is anything but beautiful.

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<sup>34</sup>Adelheid Weise, Untersuchungen, etc., pp. 35-36.

Ich finde das Schöne zum Kotzen. . . . Die Welt ist nicht schön. Was solche Musik uns vormacht, das gibt es nicht. . . . Es ist eine Illusion.<sup>35</sup>

This view of culture is directly opposed to Liesel's. I have already discussed her fascination with "das Schöne" and "das Edle", to which she paid frequent lip-service.

Eduard, another pilot, maintains that music should and can be enjoyed for its aesthetic qualities alone. He does not see the need of relating it to the misery now being experienced by both sides in this war. Music's absolute beauty provides him with momentary escape from the actual events around him which are ugly and barbarous. This attitude is shared by Liesel and the school teacher. The fact that the Germans have produced many great musicians tends to soften Eduard's opinion of them. However, in the last scene of the play, his once sensitive nature becomes perverted after his comrades have been killed in action. He turns to violence to avenge their deaths. This change in Eduard demonstrates how suffering radically conditions man's thinking.<sup>36</sup> Frisch shows us that Eduard, like Herbert, has learned

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<sup>35</sup>Stücke I, p. 101.

<sup>36</sup>A similar change in personal attitude can also be found in Frisch's next war play, Als der Krieg zu Ende war. Horst, a German soldier on the eastern front, at first found the Russians to be friendly and hospitable. However, once he was injured and the Germans began to lose the war, he began to form negative stereotyped images of the Russians.

nothing of any real consequence from his participation in the war. Instead, he now adopts the attitude of the radio operator, proclaiming at the graves of his friends: "Das alles, es muß und es wird seine Rache finden. Du hattest recht! Es gibt keinen Frieden mit dem Satan. ... Satane sind es; du hattest recht!"<sup>37</sup>

On both sides we have heard shouts of "Satane sind es", first from the school teacher, then from the radio operator and lastly from Eduard. All three have ceased to recognize individuals as such and can now only place them in the collective category of the enemy; all three have allowed themselves to form images of individuals with whom they have never had personal contact. They have become indoctrinated by the propaganda fed them in the media: films, radio and newspapers. Consequently, their opinions are now stereotyped, for their minds have been manipulated by external influences. Here, for the first time in Frisch's theatrical works, we are confronted with an issue which will appear frequently in his later plays and novels and one which troubled him for more than two decades: the tendency to form abstract fixed images of individuals or groups, and its counterpart, the tendency to accept, without question, the ready-made and often distorted images gleaned second-hand, either from the media or from acquaintances. He tells us in his Tagebuch that he has become aware of the often negative effects of the media:

... das Radio überzeugt mich von hundert Dingen, die ich nie sehen werde, oder wenn ich sie dann einmal sehe, kann ich sie nicht mehr sehen, weil ich ja schon eine Überzeugung habe, ...<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>Stücke I, p. 146.

<sup>38</sup>Tagebuch, p. 145.

Frisch maintains that the habit of perpetuating fixed images is the root of much unfounded prejudice and it also constitutes an ultimate sin against humanity. By creating or accepting an image of our fellows, we commit a crime against life itself; in a sense we kill the individual, for an image has no life. It cannot grow and evolve. Propaganda is essentially the creation of negative images of the "enemy", thereby killing him in the minds of one's own people. Naturally, its complement is usually the creation of a grossly inflated image of one's own virtues. In this play, both warring nationalities believe the others to be the guilty and evil ones. Frisch develops this self-righteous attitude further in his next play Die Chinesische Mauer when the contemporary intellectual scorns the Chinese emperor Hwang Ti with these words:

Denn die Barbaren sind immer die andern. Das ist noch heute so, Majestät. Und die Kultur, das sind immer wir. Und darum muß man die andern Völker befreien; denn wir (und nicht die andern) sind die freie Welt.<sup>39</sup>

In his last play of the forties Als der Krieg zu Ende war Frisch gives a better analysis of the negative aspects of image-forming and elaborates this theme on an even grander scale in his lengthy novel Stiller (1954) and in his last well-known play Andorra (1961).

Although Nun singen sie wieder presents a very pessimistic appraisal of man's attempts to survive the realities of war without forfeiting his moral dignity, it does not end on a tone of complete despair and resignation as Ulrich Weisstein would have us believe.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>Stücke I, p. 193.

<sup>40</sup>See Max Frisch (New York, 1967), p. 108. "Nun singen sie wieder ends in resignation, in the melancholy awareness that renunciation is the highest good."

There is hope for mankind, which is to be found not in the external world, but in man himself, in his love for his fellow men. Here Frisch touches on a theme which he develops gradually throughout his future literary works, in Als der Krieg zu Ende war, Die Chinesische Mauer,<sup>41</sup> in the novel Stiller and lastly, in Andorra. However, in Nun singen sie wieder, Frisch presents love still shrouded in sentimentality and tinged with cynicism.

Die Liebe ist schön, ... Sie allein weiß, daß sie umsonst ist,  
und sie allein verzweifelt nicht.<sup>42</sup>

His mature works will show more genuine concern for the plight of mankind and less sentiment.

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<sup>41</sup>The ending of the second version is very similar to the ending of Nun singen sie wieder. See Hellmuth Karasek, Frisch (Velber, 1969), p. 38.

<sup>42</sup>Stücke I, p. 148.

### Chapter III

#### Als der Krieg zu Ende War



Als der Krieg zu Ende war does not follow Nun singen sie wieder chronologically. Frisch began writing it in December 1947, a year after the first performance of Die Chinesische Mauer, and did not complete it until August 1948. It was staged for the first time on January 8, 1949 at the Zürcher Schauspielhaus. Three critics, Hans Bänziger, Ulrich Weisstein, and Manfred Jurgensen call it the second of Frisch's war plays (Kriegsdramen, Kriegstheater), relating and comparing it to the first. In this way, one is better able to assess the real impact which the events of the Second World War had on Frisch, as reflected in his works of the immediate post-war years. Many of the problems and issues apparent in Nun singen sie wieder reappear in Als der Krieg zu Ende war, indicating to the reader or audience Frisch's lingering pre-occupation with some very vital aspects of twentieth century life, which were accentuated in war time. In an entry in his Tagebuch dated Hamburg, November 1948, a few months after the completion of Als der Krieg zu Ende war, Frisch tells us why he cannot permit himself to condone the then prevalent attitude of letting the past take care of itself:

In einer seiner jüngsten Reden hat Winston Churchill, in bezug auf den deutschen Eroberer von Rundstedt, den Rat erteilt, man solle jetzt das Geschehene endlich geschehen sein lassen. Das ist, ... die kürzeste Formel für das, was mich bestürzt. Leider ist es ja so, daß das 'Geschehene', noch bevor es uns wirklich und fruchtbar entsetzt hat, bereits überdeckt wird von neuen Untaten, ... nicht nur in Deutschland, auch bei uns reden wir gerne vom Heute, als stünde kein Gestern dahinter. ... aber einmal, glaube ich, muß das Entsetzen uns erreichen--sonst gibt es kein Weiter.<sup>1</sup>

With this new play, Frisch intended to turn his public's

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<sup>1</sup>Tagebuch, pp. 240-241.

attention to those events which they were quickly endeavouring to forget. Only by constantly being reminded of the horrors of war, Frisch believed, would people take serious and conscious steps to assure that similar horrors did not occur again. Als der Krieg zu Ende war demonstrates openly for the first time Frisch's understanding of the playwright's commitment to developments in the real world outside the walls of the theater.

In contrast to Nun singen sie wieder, the circumstances and characters presented in this play are acknowledged by Frisch to be real, not imaginary. In the Nachwort to Als der Krieg zu Ende war we are told that the plot of the play is based on an actual story related to Frisch during his visit to Berlin at the end of the war. "Auch die deutschen Schicksale, die erwähnt werden, sind keine Erfindungen, sondern übernommen aus den Erzählungen deutscher Freunde in Berlin."<sup>2</sup> Reference to this story is found in his Tagebuch, pp. 160-61, 165, recorded during and shortly after his stay in Berlin.<sup>3</sup> In these entries, Frisch elaborates on what will later become a predominant theme in his stage portrayal of the Berlin anecdote: the obstacle to mutual love and understanding created by language.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Stücke I, p. 399.

<sup>3</sup>Frisch was an ardent traveler, both before and after the war. His Tagebuch contains numerous descriptions of the places he visited, as well as personal observations of the social and political turmoil plaguing Europe at that time.

<sup>4</sup>For a detailed analysis of Frisch's mistrust of language as exhibited in his works, see S. P. Hoefert, "Zur Sprachauffassung Max Frischs", Muttersprache, No. 73, 1963, pp. 257-59.

Sprache als Gefäß der Vorurteils! Sie, die uns verbinden könnte, ist zum Gegenteil geworden, zur tödlichen Trennung durch Vorurteil. Sprache und Lüge! Das ungeheure Paradoxon, daß man sich ohne Sprache nähert.<sup>5</sup>

The importance of language in the creation of prejudice and its role in determining or preventing eventual relationships between individuals or groups have already been alluded to in Nun singen sie wieder. In the second part of the play, in the fifth scene, we view the confrontation in the after-life between members of both enemy factions. The allied captain's fears are appeased when he realizes that the other occupants of the area understand his language. The common bond of language is the only basis for his assumption that he is in friendly territory:

Man hält uns nicht für Feinde. Das scheint mir gewiß. Und unsere Sprache versteht man auch.<sup>6</sup>

In Als der Krieg zu Ende war, Frisch examines this reliance on language as a means of establishing amicable relationships. He recognizes that the ability to communicate in a common language also carries with it the possibility of deliberate deception. Verbal or written communication between two parties does not guarantee truthfulness; the opposite is often the result.

Agnes is able to lie repeatedly to her husband, Horst, a German war veteran injured in battle, because they share a common language. On the other hand, the absence of a common tongue between herself and the Russian officer, Stepan, prevents her from deceiving him

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<sup>5</sup>Tagebuch, p. 165.

<sup>6</sup>Stücke I, p. 122.

verbally. Agnes is aware of this, for she tells Stepan late in the play:

... weißt du, daß nie eine Lüge zwischen uns ist -<sup>7</sup>

At first, when Agnes is discovered hiding in the cellar of her home now occupied by Russian troops, she is relieved to learn from Jehuda, a Russian soldier and aide of the colonel, that his commanding officer does understand German. She is requested to appear upstairs to meet the colonel and hopes to win his confidence and friendship by conversing openly with him:

Wenn es stimmt, daß er deutsch versteht - das ist die einzige Hoffnung jetzt. Ich werde sprechen mit ihm.<sup>8</sup>

Later, upon realizing that the Russian officer speaks no German, that Jehuda has not been honest with her, Agnes is terrified. She grabs a pistol which is lying on the carpet and prepares to defend herself, should she be abused by the Russians. (Several of the Russian soldiers had attempted to maltreat her earlier, before Stepan appeared). Agnes immediately assumes that linguistic differences can only result in hostility and fears for her own safety as well as that of her husband, still hiding undetected in the cellar. Her despair is so intense that she eventually faints in front of Stepan.<sup>9</sup> Frisch shows us in the remaining scenes of the play the development of a sympathetic and

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<sup>7</sup>Stücke I, p. 292.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 263.

<sup>9</sup>S. P. Hoefert interprets this fainting spell as "eine Szene die symbolisch die Ohnmacht der Sprache vor Augen führt " in "Zur Sprachauffassung Max Frischs", Muttersprache, No. 73, 1963, p. 258.

intimate relationship between Agnes and Stepan, which he intends us to view as love. Whether or not we accept his terminology is of little significance. This has been a matter for debate among his critics such as Walter Glaetti, Hans Bänziger, and Helmut Karasek. Frisch's view of love will be discussed later in this chapter. What is important though is not the definition of the relationship between Agnes and the Russian, but the fact that a positive relationship between them developed at all. The absence of direct linguistic communication is shown to be an advantage, not a disadvantage. Agnes admits to Stepan:

...was man noch mit Worten sagen kann, ist gleichgültig ...<sup>10</sup>

Frisch's mistrust of language as a means of honest communication is closely related to another issue underlying his literary work, as well as his philosophy of life. He realized very early in his career how deeply our knowledge and understanding of other people is conditioned and often distorted by the written and verbal word. Our ideas and opinions are not our own, but are the sum result of books, films, radio broadcasts, and other people's conversations. All these vehicles of communication transmit information, second-hand, to the individual who finally is incapable of distinguishing between his own thoughts and those which he has heard or read.

In my analysis of Nun singen sie wieder brief reference was made to the tendency of the major characters to classify the enemy collectively ("Satane sind es") without concern for individuals. Fixed

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<sup>10</sup>Stücke I, pp. 291-292.

images of others were formed without the benefit of personal contact. In Als der Krieg zu Ende war Frisch takes up this theme again, expanding its application and significance.

Before the play begins, Agnes had had no personal contact with anyone of Russian nationality. What she knows about the Russians has been gleaned from her husband's letters, written during war-time on the Russian front, and from the stories which Gitta has told her. With an expected degree of trepidation, but not harbouring preconceived images, she confronts the soldiers who have taken over her home. She appeals to Stepan's sense of humanity as an individual, disregarding the accumulated prejudices of her husband and Gitta.<sup>11</sup> She becomes a heroine in Frisch's eyes because she endeavours to communicate with Stepan as individual to individual, not as a German captive to a Russian victor. Hans Bänziger lauds her actions with the following words:

Sie steht am höchsten über der engstirnigen Moral der andern, welche die Seele der Menschen als Klischees sehen und in Stephan Iwanow nur ein Russenschwein erblicken können.<sup>12</sup>

When Horst speaks of the "Russenschweine", Agnes objects to classifying whole nationalities in such a manner saying:

Russenschweine, weißt du, das erinnert mich so an Judenschweine und all das andere, was unsere eigenen Schweine gesagt haben - und getan.<sup>13</sup>

In her lengthy monologue before Stepan, in the second scene of the play, Agnes utters convictions which are fundamental beliefs of Frisch,

<sup>11</sup>See Footnote 36, Chapter II.

<sup>12</sup>In Frisch und Dürrenmatt (Bern, 1960), p. 65.

<sup>13</sup>Stücke I, pp. 254-255.

the humanist:

... dieser ganze Irrsinn mit den Völkern: als wären wir nicht alle aus Fleisch und Blut, Menschen aus Fleisch und Blut, Sie und ich ...<sup>14</sup>  
 ... Wenn ein Mensch schreit, wenn einer blutet - zum Beispiel - irgendwo hört es doch einfach auf, daß ich nach seiner Nase frage, nach seiner Sprache, nach seinen Ansichten, nach dem Ort seiner Geburt - wenigstens für mich.<sup>15</sup>

She appears to have freed herself from all stereotyped images in accordance with Frisch's credo: "Du sollst dir kein Bildnis machen".

Nonetheless, her honesty and sincerity towards Stepan conflict conspicuously with her deceit and insensitivity towards her husband. We can admire her views on brotherly love and understanding, while at the same time we react only negatively to her behaviour in front of Horst. Frisch has deliberately blurred our appreciation of Agnes by introducing inconsistencies into her character. He intends her to be a controversial figure, a "negative heroine", thereby forcing his audience to ponder over her actions and motives, and to formulate a personal appraisal of her. Frisch avoids here, as in all of his plays, a closed solution or a fixed judgement, as he considers that not to be the task of the dramatist:

Die Lösung ist immer unsere Sache, meine Sache, eure Sache. Henrik Ibsen sagte: 'Zu fragen bin ich da, nicht zu antworten.' Als Stückschreiber hielte ich meine Aufgabe durchaus erfüllt, wenn es einem Stück jemals gelänge, eine Frage dermaßen zu stellen, daß die Zuschauer von dieser Stunde an ohne eine Antwort nicht mehr leben können--ohne ihre Antwort, ihre eigene, die sie nur mit dem Leben selber geben können.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Stücke I, p. 270.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 271.

<sup>16</sup>Tagebuch, p. 108.

Although Agnes has convinced herself that her affair with the Russian is an unselfish act necessary to assure the safety of her husband, the audience is not convinced. Frisch admits in the Nachwort to the 1949 edition of the play: "... freilich ist das ein heikles Spiel."<sup>17</sup>

The bitterness among the German speaking nations of Europe towards the Russians in 1949 posed an obvious obstacle to a positive reception of this play. Frisch was well aware that his audience would not automatically cast aside their prejudices when confronted with a Russian military uniform on stage. He also realized that not everyone in the audience would agree with his presentation of Agnes. Some would be unwilling to recognize her as a woman of virtue and moral dignity, viewing her only as an adulteress.<sup>18</sup> Frisch expected enraged reactions to both these issues and was not disappointed. He notes in an excerpt in his diary dated January 8, 1949, the day on which the play was performed for the first time: "Kleine Schlägerei im Foyer."<sup>19</sup> He deliberately intended to provoke and even anger his public and one suspects he was more than pleased with the result. Had no unfavourable response among the audience ensued, Frisch would not have succeeded in his attempt to present a provocative and controversial play.

More than ten years later, in a speech delivered at the opening of the Frankfurter Buchmesse in 1958, Frisch comments on the relationship between the playwright and his public, as he sees it.

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<sup>17</sup>Stücke I, p. 398.

<sup>18</sup>See Frisch's Nachwort to the play, Stücke I, pp. 398-99.

<sup>19</sup>Tagebuch, p. 246.



The following statement is particularly applicable when we consider his audiences' response to Als der Krieg zu Ende war:

Das Schlimmste ist wohl die gleichgültige Öffentlichkeit, der Partner, der überhaupt nicht zuhört, der nicht daran denkt, eine Partnerschaft mit uns anzutreten, und der uns alles schreiben läßt, ja, der uns sogar liest, mindestens konsumiert ... ohne uns auch nur als Störenfried ernstzunehmen, ... Die Gleichgültigkeit macht mich zum Schreihals,<sup>20</sup>

An angered response was an indication to Frisch that his intended provocation had met with success.

Returning to the story of Agnes and the Russian colonel, a closer look at their intimacy will reveal an important concept evident in several of Frisch's works, particularly in his novel Stiller and his last important play Andorra: the relationship between image-forming and love. In a section in his Tagebuch entitled "Du sollst dir kein Bildnis machen" and also in the Nachwort to this play, Frisch records his view of love. He claims that as long as we continue to judge people not as they are, but according to preconceived images of what they should be, we will never really be capable of loving others. What he means here by love is obviously not intended to be understood as sexual desire, but rather as a spiritual bond between individuals incorporating truthfulness, mutual trust, and general concern for the other's well-being. We cannot feel this kind of love for another if we are continually disappointed in the behavior of the one whom we pretend to love. By expecting a person to act in a particular manner, we have already formed our own mental image of that person and have therefore denied him the possibility of changing and developing; we

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<sup>20</sup>Öffentlichkeit als Partner (Frankfurt a.M., 1967), p. 64.

have denied him our love. Frisch writes:

Eben darin besteht ja die Liebe, das Wunderbare an der Liebe, daß sie uns in der Schweben des Lebendigen hält, in der Bereitschaft, einem Menschen zu folgen in allen seinen möglichen Entfaltungen. ... Unsere Meinung, daß wir das andere kennen, ist das Ende der Liebe, ...<sup>21</sup>

Man macht sich ein Bildnis. Das ist das Lieblose, der Verrat.<sup>22</sup>

Das Gebot, man solle sich kein Bildnis machen von Gott, verliert wohl seinen Sinn nicht, wenn wir Gott begreifen als das Lebendige in jedem Menschen, das Unfaßbare, das Unnennbare, das wir als solches nur ertragen, wo wir lieben.<sup>23</sup>

These beliefs of Frisch are essential for our comprehension of the characters and their often thwarted attempts to form lasting and meaningful relationships which appear in many of his works. His concern with image-forming is, however, not an original concept. Bertolt Brecht had already given much thought to the same question, as is evident from a short passage contained in his "Notizen zur Philosophie 1929-1941" entitled "Über das Anfertigen von Bildnissen". There he writes:

Der Mensch macht sich von den Dingen, mit denen er in Berührung kommt und auskommen muß, Bilder, kleine Modelle, die ihm verraten, wie sie funktionieren. Solche Bildnisse macht er sich auch von Menschen: ... Es entstehen Illusionen, die Mitmenschen enttäuschen, ihre Bildnisse werden undeutlich; ... die Menschen [sind] nicht ebenso fertig ... wie die Bildnisse, die man von ihnen macht und die man also auch besser nie ganz fertigmachen sollte. ... Wenn man den Menschen liebt, kann man aus seinen beobachteten Verhaltensarten und der Kenntnis seiner Lage solche Verhaltensarten für ihn ableiten, die für ihn gut sind.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Tagebuch, p. 26.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>23</sup>Stücke I, p. 398.

<sup>24</sup>Bertolt Brecht, Gesammelte Werke 20 (Frankfurt a. M., 1967), pp. 168-169.

It is obvious, though, from this short excerpt that Frisch and Brecht held opposing viewpoints on the question of image-forming. Adelheid Weise makes this quite clear in her recent study of Frisch's dramas:

Während Brecht den Entwurf von produktiven Bildnissen als seine Aufgabe begreift, sieht Frisch gerade umgekehrt, den Künstler dazu verpflichtet, jedes Bildnis zu zerstören und die Vielfalt der menschlichen Existenzmöglichkeiten freizusetzen. . . .<sup>25</sup>

In der Liebesauffassung wird der Gegensatz der beiden Dichter Brecht und Frisch noch einmal deutlich: Brecht glaubt den Menschen zu lieben, indem er sich ein Bildnis von ihm macht; Frisch hält die Zerstörung jeglichen Bildnisses für den Ausdruck seiner Menschenliebe.<sup>26</sup>

Although the argumentation is reversed, one begins to suspect that perhaps Frisch was inspired through the influence of Brecht to give deeper thought to image-forming and its relation to prejudice and love. We know from Frisch's own writings, in both his Tagebuch (pp. 210-216) and in journalistic articles,<sup>27</sup> of his personal friendship with Brecht beginning in November 1947, shortly after the latter's arrival in Switzerland. Upon returning to Europe from America, Brecht brought with him a number of unpublished manuscripts which contained most of his philosophical and literary writings completed in exile. We know that Brecht permitted Frisch to read a copy of his "Kleinen Organon" before it was published, anxious for Frisch's comments and criticism.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>25</sup>Untersuchungen zur Thematik und Struktur der Dramen von Max Frisch (Göppingen, 1970), pp. 187-88.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 138.

<sup>27</sup>"Erinnerungen an Brecht von Max Frisch", Kursbuch, No. 7, 1966, pp. 1-22. Repeated in part in "Der Autor und das Theater", Öffentlichkeit als Partner (Frankfurt, a. M., 1967), pp. 78-79.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 8.

The possibility of his having read other manuscripts, including "Über das Anfertigen von Bildnissen", or at least having discussed with Brecht some of the pertinent ideas contained in them, cannot be dismissed altogether.

In this play, Agnes demonstrates Frisch's concept of love. Repeatedly in the last scene she emphasizes that she has grown to love Stepan and that he loves her also:

... ich weiß nicht, wer du bist. Nur daß wir einander lieben.<sup>29</sup>

Ich schlafe mit dir - Stepan Iwanow, ein Mann der nichts anderes von mir weiß, als daß ich ihn liebe, und der mich wieder liebt.<sup>30</sup>

Frisch is also aware that this love is adultery, but still maintains that its validity exists in the prejudice-free attitude toward each other exhibited by Agnes and Stepan:

Im Vordergrund ... steht eine Liebe, die, auch wenn man sie als Ehebruch bezeichnen mag, das Gegenteil jener Veründigung und insofern heilig ist, als sie das Bildnis überwindet.<sup>31</sup>

Frisch also admits in the Nachwort that this play deals with an exceptional situation, but nonetheless, an actual one. Although he wishes to change the opinions of his audience towards the Russian communists who occupied not only Berlin, but also a large portion of the German speaking territory of Europe in the years immediately after the war, Frisch does not pretend that all German women were treated as gently as Agnes was. Yet what he does hope to demonstrate is simply this: that the collective images of the Russians held by the German-speaking population,

<sup>29</sup>Stücke I, p. 292.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 293.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 398.

i.e., plundering, rape and drunken brawls, were, as is the case with all pre-conceived images, not always valid. Stepan proves the exception to the rule. Frisch hoped that, in the light of this story, his public would be awakened to their own distorted images of other people, not only the Russians, and would consciously attempt to change their way of thinking, by ridding their minds of clichés.

Beneath the more obvious themes of this play, is the question of "Kultur", which played a prominent role in Nun singen sie wieder. In the figure of Halske, the German pianist, Frisch intends us to recognize the kind of individual whom he had criticized and exposed in Nun singen sie wieder. He, like the school teacher, is the embodiment of what Frisch calls an "ästhetische Kultur",<sup>32</sup> a "Kultur" detached from morality and conditions in the world around him. Halske remarks to Jehuda in the last scene of the play:

Was hat Mozart zu tun mit dem Dritten Reich? Und was habe ich anderes getan: als Mozart gespielt mitten im Luftterror, ...<sup>33</sup>

When Jehuda begins to describe the horrors of the Jewish ghetto in Warsaw, Halske interrupts him saying:

Ich weiß nicht, warum Sie mir das erzählen. Gerade mir. Damit habe ich wirklich nichts zu tun, weiß Gott -. ... ich habe nichts gegen die Juden. In unserem Orchester gab es eine ganze Reihe von Juden, die wirklich begabt waren.

... ich bin Künstler.

... ich mische mich nicht in Politik.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>See Footnote 3, Chap. I.

<sup>33</sup>Stücke I, p. 288.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 289.

Halske's condescension is obvious here. He epitomizes the man of "Kultur" for whom politics is "das Niedrige, womit der geistige Mensch, der berühmte Kulturträger, sich nicht beschmutzen soll."<sup>35</sup> Because he is an artist, he maintains that his profession exempts him from all responsibility and blame for governmental or military actions. He remains aloof and detached from reality. It is significant, therefore, that he is the one who betrays Agnes' husband, Horst. Frisch deliberately gives Halske this function, to support his much reiterated theory that "Kultur" and intellectualism cannot be separated from involvement in the plight of one's fellow men.

Other more subtle allusions to the question of "Kultur" are also evident in this play. Agnes is told by Jehuda that Stepan has an extensive knowledge of German literature and is also not ignorant of the German contribution to classical music. Jehuda is intelligent enough to realize that a German woman could possibly be persuaded to co-operate more readily if she thought that the Russian officer was highly educated. She is somewhat flattered that a man of considerable learning should be interested in her. When she later discovers that Jehuda had fabricated the story about Stepan's knowledge of German language and literature, she uses the same means of deceit to appease her husband's fears. Horst's attitude to his wife's daily visits upstairs among the Russians is softened by the reports of intellectual discussions which his wife relates to him upon her return to the cellar. He remarks to Agnes:

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<sup>35</sup>See Footnote 23, Chapter I.

... ich finde es ja großartig, daß so ein Russe besser Bescheid weiß als wir.<sup>36</sup>

Both Jehuda and Agnes use the accepted view of "Kultur" to further their own dishonest plans. Frisch again exposes the shallowness of this attitude, something which he had already shown in the first war play, and which is also included, to a lesser degree, in Die Chinesische Mauer.

Although several critics have questioned the dramatic quality of Als der Krieg zu Ende war and the feasibility of presenting it successfully on stage, stressing its narrative features,<sup>37</sup> there appears to be no doubt that it is one of Frisch's definitive humanistic works. What Frisch presents on stage is more philosophy than theatre. Agnes expounds the author's humanistic sentiments in much the same way as the Contemporary in Die Chinesische Mauer. Both are mouth-pieces of Frisch's personal beliefs. In his analysis of this play, Manfred Jurgensen concludes: "Wir ... meinen aber, daß Frisch in Als der Krieg zu Ende war vorzugsweise als Humanist und nicht als Dichter in Erscheinung tritt"<sup>38</sup>. Hans Bänziger recognizes that the moral issues which Frisch demonstrates are essential ones "was ihn als Schweizer, als Humanisten bestürze".<sup>39</sup> The author probes deeply into human relationships to discover how genuine and honest

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<sup>36</sup>Stücke I, p. 282.

<sup>37</sup>See Ulrich Weisstein, Max Frisch (New York, 1967), p. 113, and Manfred Jurgensen, Max Frisch Die Dramen (Bern, 1968), pp. 108-110.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 107.

<sup>39</sup>Frisch und Dürrenmatt (Bern, 1960), p. 66.

they are. His primary concern here is with morals and not theatre, with the distinction between human and inhuman behavior, which constitutes his understanding of humanism.

In this play as well as in Nun singen sie wieder, Frisch has concentrated on portraying the German-Swiss scene; his characters and stories have been based on actual European events of the forties. The scope of both plays is somewhat narrow; both therefore lack universal appeal. In Die Chinesische Mauer, however, Frisch's interest shifts from a limited viewpoint to the world as a whole. This broadening of dramatic scope, coupled with the development of his theatrical technique, is a significant turning point in his career as a playwright. He begins to distance himself from actualities; objectivity gradually replaces personal sentiment.



## Chapter IV

### Die Chinesische Mauer

The second of Frisch's plays to reach the stage is Die Chinesische Mauer, subtitled "Eine Farce", which was premiered at the Zürcher Schauspielhaus on October 10, 1946, under the direction of Leonhard Steckel. As is often the case with many of Frisch's works, it quickly became the subject of conflicting critical interpretations:

... die Chinesische Mauer ist sicherlich das verzweifelte Stück von Frisch, an das sich nicht zufällig Debatten darüber anknüpften ...<sup>1</sup>

In his much quoted book on Frisch and his Swiss contemporary Dürrenmatt, Hans Bänziger compares this play with the two previously discussed:

Die beiden besprochenen Kriegsdramen sind so sehr aus der Zeitgenossenschaft geschrieben, daß dabei gewisse elementare Voraussetzungen des Theaters verloren gingen. ... zu unterhalten und den Menschen am Rande seiner Existenz, auf die großen Spiele der Welt aufmerksam zu machen. In der Chinesischen Mauer befreit er sich vom Aktualistischen und greift zurück auf das Ursprünglichste im Theater: Maske, Spiel und Tanz.<sup>2</sup>

Speaking of the second edition of the play which appeared in 1955 and which contained some major revisions, particularly in the role of "der Heutige", Bänziger continues:

Die Thematik Geist und Macht tritt in den Hintergrund; im Vordergrund steht das reine Spiel.<sup>3</sup>

Manfred Jurgensen takes the opposite viewpoint:

Das Stück trägt nur allzu deutlich den Stempel weltpolitischer Aktualität. ... Sie [die Farce] erweist sich im Grunde ihres Wesens als fast meditativ und gehört deshalb auch kaum auf die Bühne. ... Die Farce hätte sich jedenfalls besser als Prosaskizze geeignet.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Hellmuth Karasek, Max Frisch (Velber, 1969), p. 31.

<sup>2</sup>Hans Bänziger, Frisch und Dürrenmatt (Bern, 1960), p. 67.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 68.

<sup>4</sup>Manfred Jurgensen, Max Frisch Die Dramen (Bern, 1968), pp. 62-63-65.

A third critic, Ulrich Weisstein, openly expresses his dissatisfaction with Die Chinesische Mauer in the following comment:

Even in the considerably more polished later versions, Die Chinesische Mauer must be regarded as Frisch's least successful play; for in it dramaturgical ingenuity ... is stressed at the expense of depth and clarity.<sup>5</sup>

The controversy about the theatrical merits and demerits of Die Chinesische Mauer involves many critics. Frisch's own dissatisfaction with the dramaturgy of the earliest version is recorded in Akzente, ii, 1955, pp. 386-391:

... statt die Geschichte von dem Tyrannen und dem Stummen hervorzubringen, bemüht sich das Stück, uns die Bedeutung eben dieser Geschichte einzupauken. ... Ein Monat, so dachte ich ... dürfte genügen, um die "Bedeutung" abzukratzen und das Stück auf seine blanke Handlung zu reduzieren. ... Wieweit das gelungen ist, und ob eine solche Umarbeitung nur eine Fingerübung bleibt, nützlich allein für den Schriftsteller selbst, oder ob dem Publikum daraus ein reineres Vergnügen entsteht, mag sich nun zeigen.<sup>6</sup>

Walter Jacobi believes that Frisch was successful in achieving the delicate balance of thought and theatrical craftsmanship which he set as his goal in the revised second version:

Das Wort und den ins Bild gesetzten Vorgang benutzt er gleichwertig.<sup>7</sup>

However, a close look at the revised play makes this and similar verdicts (Bänziger's in particular) questionable. I am inclined to agree with Weisstein that "This balance, postulated as a goal, is missing in the parabolic farce, ..." <sup>8</sup> and that Frisch was continually preoccupied

<sup>5</sup>Ulrich Weisstein, Max Frisch (New York, 1967), p. 118.

<sup>6</sup>Max Frisch, "Zur Chinesischen Mauer", Akzente, ii, 1955, pp. 389, 390.

<sup>7</sup>Walter Jacobi, "Max Frisch 'Die Chinesische Mauer': Die Beziehung zwischen Sinngehalt und Form", Deutschunterricht, XIII, iv, 1961, p. 104.

<sup>8</sup>Ulrich Weisstein, Max Frisch (New York, 1967), p. 118.

with the "deeper meaning" behind the action of the play. His humanistic and moralistic concerns constantly override his attempts to produce a pure theatre piece. Adelheid Weise, in her recently published comprehensive study of Frisch's dramas, sees this tendency inherent in all his stage efforts, although Frisch's technique does admittedly become more polished in his later plays, but is never fully mastered. She makes the following statement in the concluding chapter of her dissertation:

Max Frisch ... bezeichnet sich selbst als einen Stückeschreiber, der Partituren für das Theater herstellt, sich aber mit dem theatralischen Material und seinen Verwendungsmöglichkeiten nicht genügend auskennt, um es für seine Zwecke verwenden zu können. Seine Bemühungen, an der dramaturgischen Arbeit am Stück mitzuwirken, können die Tatsache nicht verbergen, daß die Hauptaussagekraft seiner Stücke in der Sprache liegt und die szenische Verwirklichung dagegen sekundäre Bedeutung hat.<sup>9</sup>

I will attempt to show that in essence Die Chinesische Mauer even in the second edition (1955) remains a product of the post-war forties and is indeed very similar in spirit to both Nun singen sie wieder and Als der Krieg zu Ende war. It does represent, to a degree, a landmark in Frisch's dramatic career in that he begins here the stage experimentation which gains more significance in his later plays, particularly in Biedermann und die Brandstifter (1957), Andorra (1961) and Biografie (1967).

Although the outward setting of the play is far removed from actual events, in contrast to Nun singen sie wieder and Als der Krieg zu Ende war, I cannot agree with Bänziger when he states that: "in der

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<sup>9</sup>Untersuchungen zur Thematik und Struktur der Dramen von Max Frisch (Göppingen, 1970), pp. 183-184.

Chinesischen Mauer erst befreiter [Frisch] sich vom Aktualistischen".<sup>10</sup>

This play is a product of its time. On the surface, its content may appear alien, the setting being the empire of an ancient Chinese civilization, but this geographical and historical distance is used merely to effect "Verfremdung", unfortunately without the successful results of Brecht, whom Frisch was imitating. The issues at stake in this play are as modern and as relevant to real circumstances as those already expressed in Frisch's first Zeitstück, Nun singen sie wieder. Joachim Müller therefore concludes that:

Die Grundthematik der "Farce" ... knüpft an das erste  
Kriegsstück an.<sup>11</sup>

If we accept Theodore Ziolkowski's statement: "This play was Frisch's response to the invention of the atom bomb and its frightful implications for society"<sup>12</sup> and also that of Weisstein: "... it is, an allegorical résumé of the political situation in Europe at the end of World War II"<sup>13</sup> then all the theatrical embellishments added in 1955 do not obscure its real humanistic message.

Fragmentary references to Die Chinesische Mauer can be found in Frisch's Tagebuch, this time not in the form of a prose sketch, as is the case with Als der Krieg zu Ende war, as well as his later plays Biedermann und die Brandstifter and Andorra, but in dispersed comments

<sup>10</sup>Frisch und Dürrenmatt (Bern, 1960), p. 67.

<sup>11</sup>"Max Frisch und Friedrich Dürrenmatt als Dramatiker der Gegenwart", Universitas, 17 Jg., 1962, p. 727.

<sup>12</sup>"Max Frisch: Moralist without a Moral", Yale French Studies, Vol. ~~XXIX~~, 1962, p. 135,

<sup>13</sup>Max Frisch (New York, 1967), p. 119.

all related to a similar theme: man's ability to choose and direct his way of life and the lives of his contemporaries. Pictures of the devastation wrought by the atomic explosion at Bikini moved Frisch to write in 1946:

... der Fortschritt, der nach Bikini führte, wird auch den letzten Schritt noch machen: die Sintflut wird herstellbar. Das ist das Großartige. Wir können, was wir wollen, und es fragt sich nur noch, was wir wollen; am Ende unseres Fortschrittes stehen wir da, wo Adam und Eva gestanden haben; es bleibt uns nur noch die sittliche Frage. ... was man beim Anblick dieser Bilder erlebt; es ist ... das Bewusstsein, daß wir uns entscheiden müssen, das Gefühl, daß wir noch einmal die Wahl haben und vielleicht zum letztenmal; ein Gefühl von Würde; es liegt an uns, ob es eine Menschheit gibt oder nicht.<sup>14</sup>

In 1947, after viewing a performance of Die Chinesische Mauer in Prague, Frisch spoke with a number of his Czech friends about the various possible means of bringing about a political change. It is of interest to note that the language he uses to describe their different reactions to this question is very similar both to dialogue found in the play and to the above quoted diary excerpt recorded one year earlier:

Wir wollen die Würde aller Menschen. ... Die Würde des Menschen, scheint mir, besteht in der Wahl. ... Erst aus der möglichen Wahl gibt sich die Verantwortung; die Schuld oder die Freiheit; die menschliche Würde, ...<sup>15</sup>

This was the conclusion reached during that political discussion. Just one year before, this question of choice and responsibility appeared so crucial to Frisch, especially in the wake of the first atomic explosions, that he set himself the task of creating a stage play whose prime intent and purpose was the public communication of this message.

<sup>14</sup>Tagebuch, pp. 52-53.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 124.

In erster Linie ging es ihm wohl darum, seine Besorgnis kundzutun, eine Warnung auszusprechen und die Verantwortlichen (uns alle?) zur Besinnung aufzurufen.<sup>16</sup>

However, in 1955, when atomic power had become an accepted fact of life and the heated political atmosphere of the east-west cold war had become somewhat subdued, the message of Die Chinesische Mauer seemed outdated and no longer applicable to or effective in a society that had already survived a decade of the atomic era. Man's self-destructive potential now was being viewed in a more sober and less hysterical manner. Frisch therefore decided to update the play, to inject it with new life by supposedly reducing the didactic emphasis and heightening its theatrical structure. Yet, even the 1955 version remains a public testimony of Frisch, the moralist and humanist, in spite of Frisch's efforts.

Structurally, there is little change in the second edition and the only major character change of any obvious significance is in the role of the young man of modern day society. In the first version,<sup>17</sup> he is described as Min Ko, "ein junger Mann von heute"<sup>18</sup>, who appears on stage at the beginning of the play dressed in the easily recognized outfit of a bohemian artist:

... lange graue Hosen, dann ein schwarzer Pullover, der um den Hals geschlossen ist, ein rotes Halstuch, eine Baskenmütze.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Manfred Jurgensen, Max Frisch, Die Dramen (Bern, 1968), p. 62.

<sup>17</sup>Max Frisch, Die Chinesische Mauer (Schwabe Verlag, Bern, 1947), hereafter referred to as C. M., 1947.

<sup>18</sup>C.M., 1947, in the list of "Figuren", p. 5.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 7.

The revolutionary songs which have become popular among the people of Hwang Ti's empire were composed by him. He is a poet of liberation, (Freiheitsdichter), an idealist impelled by the urge to reform society, thereby changing the despotic system and creating a better way of life for the common people. In the prologue to the play, he sings along with the people and encourages them with these words to revolutionary actions:

Los, los, liebe Leute, wir müssen anfangen! Bevor die Welt untergeht - wir müssen anfangen ... mit Singen allein verändern wir nichts!<sup>20</sup>

Later in the play, he reveals his true identity to the emperor's daughter, Mee Lan:

Mee Lan: Du bist es, dessen Lieder sie singen? ... Du bist Min Ko - Du?

Min Ko: Ich bin es, ja. ... Zum ersten Male weiss ich, dass ich ein Dichter, die Welt verändern kann.<sup>21</sup>

Min Ko is an idealist in the truest sense. He lacks two essential characteristics necessary for attaining his political goal. First, he is a moral coward. A deaf mute is captured by the emperor's guards and is accused of being Min Ko. The real Min Ko, without uttering a word of protest, allows this poor man to be tried and tortured in his presence and in his place. Secondly, because he is an artist and a member of the intellectual class, he does not win the total confidence of the people, who have always nurtured a certain mistrust for intellectuals while at the same time admiring their minds and their artistic

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<sup>20</sup>C.M., 1947, p. 14.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 46.



contributions. Although he claims that songs and poems are not sufficient for effecting change, that is all he has to offer. Min Ko's failure to bring about a people's revolution can be viewed as a deliberate anti-Brechtian argument. Frisch, unlike Brecht, does not believe that artists or art forms are capable of directly producing social or political change. Adelheid Weise gives a detailed discussion of this and similar anti-Brechtian themes in Frisch's plays, remarking in a footnote:

Im Gegensatz zu Brecht kommt Frisch jedoch zu dem Ergebnis, daß der Intellektuelle der Macht gegenüber ohnmächtig ist, weil er keinerlei Einfluß auf das Volk ausübt.<sup>22</sup>

In the second version of the play, Min Ko, the poet of liberation, no longer exists as a stage character. Instead, the chief protagonist is "der Heutige", a modern academic possessing a Doctor-of-Laws degree, who is well versed in the scientific jargon of the post-Einstein age. This time, the name Min Ko represents the revolutionary unrest which is brewing among the people of Hwang Ti's empire. "Der Heutige" himself puts the thought in the audience's mind that Min Ko is in fact any intellectual, not a particular person:

Hwang Ti: Du bist Min Ko? - Du?

Der Heutige: So gut wie irgendeiner.<sup>23</sup>

This is the most important change in the play as Frisch shifts the focus of his critical attention away from the figure of the creative

<sup>22</sup>Weise, Untersuchungen, etc., p. 45, Footnote 2.

<sup>23</sup>Stücke I, p. 231.

artist to the intellectual in general. However, the course of fictional stage events is not altered. Again, a deaf mute is captured and accused of being Min Ko, whose eventual trial and torture act as a warning to all citizens that dissent among the emperor's subjects will not be tolerated. As in the first version, the modern academic assumes the role of the court jester and remains an ineffective bystander, unwilling to risk his life by protesting against the obvious unjust treatment of an innocent person.<sup>24</sup>

Both editions of the play have their immediate setting in ancient China at the time of the emperor Hwang Ti. His troops have just defeated the last of his foreign enemies and a great banquet is being arranged to celebrate the victory. However, Hwang Ti is aware that not all of his people are in full agreement with his domestic and foreign policies and blames this growing disenchantment with his government on the revolutionary teachings and encouragement of Min Ko; hence, the arrest, trial and torture mentioned above. Before the formal celebrations begin, the emperor announces his plans for the building of a massive and lengthy wall around his territory to safeguard the civilized and enlightened people of the Chinese region from the ruinous and decadent influence of the barbaric tribes to the north. Hwang Ti is anxious to protect "die große Ordnung und die wahre Ordnung und die Endgültige Ordnung"<sup>25</sup> of his domain, for which his troops have been fighting, and which, he maintains, has at last been established in his

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<sup>24</sup>Peter Demetz notes that "der Heutige" fails to involve himself on four separate occasions. See Postwar German Literature (New York, 1970), p. 115.

<sup>25</sup>Stücke I, p. 187.

kingdom. The proposed erection of this wall is intended to represent the emperor's attempt to cut off his people from all foreign influence, thereby alienating them from all contact with the outside world. It is a symbol of confinement and eventual political and social stagnation, likened by Walter Jacobi to the Iron Curtain dividing Eastern Europe from the West:

Die Mauer ... ist als Symbol benutzt für die Abgeschlossenheit des totalen Staates, ein Symbol, das in unserer Sprache eiserner Vorhang heißt.<sup>26</sup>

Hans Bänziger, on the other hand, relates the construction of the Chinese wall and Frisch's interest in this theme to a more immediate concern of the playwright which only became widely publicized in the years directly preceding the appearance of the second edition:

Das Motiv der chinesischen Mauer ... Denn erstens ist es ein für Frisch stets wichtiges Sinnbild für die schweizerische Gefangenschaft, für das Territorium, das die Tendenz zur Erstarrung besitzt.<sup>27</sup>

Frisch's criticism of the Swiss attitude to society and social change is now well documented. Here, it will suffice to mention that Frisch views his homeland as a place of stagnation where people are more concerned with preserving the past than creating a progressive future. This attitude, Frisch maintains, is well represented in the Swiss style of architecture. He names the following as particular characteristics of his compatriots which he dislikes:

... die schweizerische Angst vor der Verwandlung überhaupt, das schweizerische Bedürfnis, im 19. Jahrhundert zu leben, ...

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<sup>26</sup>"Max Frisch, 'Die Chinesische Mauer': Die Beziehung zwischen Sinngehalt und Form", Deutschunterricht v. 13, iv, 1961, p. 97.

<sup>27</sup>Frisch und Dürrenmatt (Bern, 1960), pp. 69-70.

das schweizerische Ressentiment gegenüber der Tatsache, daß  
die Weltgeschichte nicht uns zuliebe stehenbleibt, die  
schweizerische Lustlosigkeit gegenüber der Zukunft, ...<sup>28</sup>

The Chinese Wall can be interpreted in general terms as an effort to  
forestall the future and the march of history, to preserve what has  
been created for all times:

Hwang Ti: Fürchtet euch nicht vor der Zukunft, meine  
Getreuen. Denn so, wie es ist, wird es bleiben.  
Wir werden jede Zukunft verhindern.<sup>29</sup>

The absurdity of such a statement becomes apparent in the structural  
design of the play itself. Hwang Ti has not been successful in his  
attempt to make history stand still. Figures from other times and  
places are seen in his palace.

Although the Chinese court provides the background for the  
complete play, two other general units of historical time are woven into  
the Chinese scene. This clever juxtaposition of ages is already a part  
of the first version, but is expanded and treated with much more emphasis  
and dramatic finesse in the second. Guests invited to the emperor's  
banquet include the following historical and literary figures from  
various eras: Napoleon and Philip II of Spain, the former a military  
despot and the latter a religious fanatic; the Roman, Brutus, murderer  
of Julius Caesar, who was not afraid to act out of his convictions in  
order that the world might be freed of tyranny; Pontius Pilate, a  
biblical figure who refused to implicate himself in Jesus' fate, a man  
afraid to make a firm decision; Columbus, the discoverer of the New

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<sup>28</sup>"Cum grano salis", Werk, XL, x, 1953, p. 328.

<sup>29</sup>Stücke I, p. 187. See C. M. 1947, p. 66, for a shortened  
version.

World who searched for truth without considering how the results of his search might be manipulated and abused for political reasons; Romeo and Juliet, lovers who would not be separated by family or political differences; Cleopatra, a woman interested in love for political gain; Don Juan, the legendary lady charmer who has been portrayed by a variety of authors, and whose name has become a household word; Inconnue de la Seine, about whom the world knows nothing, except from her death mask; and the two modern characters Frack and Cut who are primarily interested in only one thing - capital gain. In the 1955 edition, we are told by a servant that Hitler and a party from Moscow are attempting to gain entrance to the celebrations, but are turned away.<sup>30</sup> These last two belong, of course, not to the array of historical figures, but to a third time level also interwoven into the play, the modern age, represented by the Contemporary. These figures do not take active part in the main story-line which concerns Hwang Ti and his endeavour to suppress public dissent. Reading the early version, one begins to suspect that at that time Frisch had not clearly established in his own mind the purpose and function of these peripheral figures. He allows them to philosophize freely on the present state of the world, but deletes much of this commentary in the revised play.<sup>31</sup> This time

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<sup>30</sup>This can be interpreted as another minor attempt to modernize the play, by introducing characters from recent history. However, as political fanatics are already represented in the figures of Napoleon and Philip II, there is no real need for a duplication of types on stage.

<sup>31</sup>See in particular Don Juan's speech, C. M. 1947, p. 87, and Stücke I, pp. 204-205. His comment: "Es schmilzt uns die Erde unter den Sohlen, Schauen Sie hin: Spanier, Chinesen, Römer, alles setzt auf einander " is not included in his second edition.

he intends these ideas to be obvious from the performance of the characters, not merely from their philosophizing. To accomplish this effect, Frisch uses some clever theatrical tricks which illustrate, in a subtle manner, the role these additional characters play in the Chinese story.

All these figures are familiar to us, not as living personalities, but as part of the literary and cultural heritage of the western world. This is made explicit only in the second version of the play when the Contemporary, upon approaching Napoleon, tells the French conqueror:

Aber noch heutigen Tags, Exzellenz, sind Sie ein Inbegriff. Ihre Persönlichkeit ... kennt jeder Gebildete, jeder Halbgebildete, und das ist heutzutage die große Menge. ... Sie gehören zu den Figuren, die unser Hirn bevölkern, und insofern, als Figur unseres Denkens, sind Sie durchaus noch lebendig.<sup>32</sup>

Frisch has deliberately chosen the phrase "Hirn bevölkern". He intends us to realize that our minds are actually populated by a variety of figures from the past whom we pretend to know. However, what we do know about each is really a very small part of his whole personality, a stereotyped image which has been passed down through history. These fixed images have become imprinted on our minds and our behavioral patterns are still controlled, to a degree, by their influence. Consequently, none of us possesses total consciousness. Each person's mind has become a depository for a select number of pre-conceived notions, a virtual "Gehäuse" unto itself.<sup>33</sup> This explanation is noticeably missing

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<sup>32</sup>Stücke I, p. 159.

<sup>33</sup>This loss of "ein zusammenfassendes Bewußtsein" is lamented by Romeo in the early edition. See C. M. 1947, p. 116. In the second version Frisch deletes this statement, hoping the message will come across through the characters themselves.

in the first version. In his own commentary on the play, Frisch elaborates further on the role of these accessory characters:

Die Figuren, die unser Hirn bevölkern, haben ihre Existenz ausschließlich in der Sprache.<sup>34</sup>

We have come to know each of them through the written word of others, and have consequently accepted the personalities of each as portrayed in literature, or in the Bible, as is the case with Pontius Pilate. In comparing both versions of the play, it is obvious that this point is made clear only in the revised edition. Instead of having these characters speak in normal conversational prose, as appears in the early play, in his revised text Frisch uses the medium through which the public have come to know them. For example: Romeo and Juliet converse in Shakespearean verse, as does Brutus; Pontius Pilate explains his part in Jesus' trial and crucifixion in the language of the Bible and Don Juan complains that he has been falsely depicted in literature by a number of dramatists ranging from Schiller to Frisch himself. (Here,

tongue in cheek, Frisch deliberately alludes to another of his plays Don Juan, which had already appeared in 1952.) Don Juan's

following lament is also missing from the 1947 version:

Alle Welt bildet sich ein, mich zu kennen. Zu Unrecht,  
Mademoiselle, zu Unrecht! ... Sie irren sich! Sie kennen  
mich vom Theater - ... Was hat man mir schon alles ange-  
dichtet! ... Was immer ich tue oder lasse, alles wird mir  
verdeutet und verdichtet. ...Wo ist das Land ohne Literatur? <sup>35</sup>

This is essentially a reiteration of a theme already expounded in both

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<sup>34</sup>Max Frisch, "Zur Chinesischen Mauer", Akzente, ii, 1955, p. 390.

<sup>35</sup>Stücke I, pp. 165-166.

Nun singen sie wieder and Als der Krieg zu Ende war - the harmful effects of propaganda. The written word has become a vehicle of distortion, instead of a propagator of truth. All too often we rely on newspapers and books for information and usually accept, without question or doubt, what appears in print. Frisch wants to awaken our consciousness to this falsifying potential of the written word, in the hope that we will become more critical of information gleaned from others.

Don Juan, as well as the other historical and literary figures, remains masked throughout the play. This masking performs two theatrical functions: 1. to emphasize that the characters who appear have already been given a 'face' and personality in literature, which we have come to accept without question: "Die historischen Figuren leben nicht in ihrem wahren Sogewesen-Sein in unserer Vorstellung ... sondern umgestaltet. ... wir maskieren sie nicht einmal nach unseren persönlichen Wünschen, sondern nehmen sie so an, wie ein anderer sie für uns maskiert hat";<sup>36</sup> 2. to emphasize that what the audience is viewing is a play. This second aspect is stressed more in the revised edition where the text itself reminds the audience that theatre is being exposed as theatre. The many references to "Spiel" and "Farce" inserted in 1955 are examples of Frisch's efforts to strengthen the play's effect.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>Walter Jacobi, "Max Frisch, 'Die Chinesische Mauer': Die Beziehung zwischen Sinngehalt und Form", Deutschunterricht, v. XIII, No. 4, 1961, pp. 99-100.

<sup>37</sup>For a detailed analysis of this theme, see Günter Waldmann, "Das Verhängnis der Geschichtlichkeit. Max Frisch 'Die Chinesische Mauer', Wirkendes Wort, 17 Jg., Heft 4, 1967, p. 264-71.



In the prologue of the revised version, the Contemporary tells the audience:

Ort der Handlung: diese Bühne. (Oder man könnte auch sagen: unser Bewußtsein ..)<sup>38</sup>

The court of the emperor Hwang Ti is therefore only one part of the actual setting of the play which is in the minds and imagination of the audience. Frisch tells us in his Tagebuch:

Spielplatz ist immer die menschliche Seele!<sup>39</sup>

Therefore, the other two intersecting time levels -- modern society represented by the Contemporary, and the world of the masks--are able to exist alongside the ancient Chinese world. Frisch does not believe in the popular accepted theory of linear time and history. This is revealed in his Tagebuch (pp. 19, 129, 216), and is commented upon in detail by Günter Waldmann.<sup>40</sup> Waldmann also points out that in this play Frisch gives us an all-embracing, wide-sweeping gaze, not only geographically, from east to west, but also historically. The playwright forsakes, for a moment, his European milieu, the world of Nun singen sie wieder and Als der Krieg zu Ende war, and gives us an experimental form of "Welttheater". Frisch's understanding of the relative nature of time, space and history provides the structural basis for this play, allowing the various characters to mingle and converse freely with each other, regardless of the actual historical time in

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<sup>38</sup>Stücke I, p. 156.

<sup>39</sup>Tagebuch, p. 195.

<sup>40</sup>"Das Verhängnis der Geschichtlichkeit", etc., pp. 264-71.

which they lived. The Contemporary makes this point clear to the emperor's daughter when he approaches her in scene seven. When he tells her: "Ich komme aus einer andern Zeit."<sup>41</sup> Mee Lan pleads: "O sag mir, was ihr wißt!"<sup>42</sup> Part of his reply is: "... die Zeit, zum Beispiel, ist relativ".<sup>43</sup> This neutralizing of all historical time is necessary in this play, particularly in the revised version, so that the Contemporary can perform his function as chief protagonist. (In the 1947 text, Min Ko is a part of the Chinese time unit). He is the instigator of controversial dialogue when he comes in contact with members of the other two time levels. His function is the same as Min Ko's in the first edition: to undermine tyranny. However, Frisch intends us to view the tyranny under attack not as something passé, but on the contrary, as something ever present in our modern world, which we allow to exist. In the prologue, the Contemporary, acting as a commentator, asks:

Wo liegt (heute) dieses Nanking? Und wer ist (heute) Hwang  
Ti, der Himmelssohn, der immer im Recht ist?<sup>44</sup>

However, he does not supply an answer to these questions thereby leaving the public free to reflect upon them in the context of the play. Yet, a direct answer is provided by Hwang Ti himself, in scene eleven, when he steps out of the dramatic action and addresses the audience:

Geht hinaus und kauft eure Zeitung, ihr da unten, und auf

<sup>41</sup>Stücke I, p. 177.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 156.

der vordersten Seite, ihr werdet sehen, steht mein Name.<sup>45</sup>

Neither of the above quoted lines is included in the 1947 version. It appears to me that such additions to the script do not help diminish the play's didactic character, but certainly enhance it.

A detailed comparison of both versions does admittedly reveal a considerable number of minor changes in and additions to the basic story-line. However, the play's message, and Frisch's message, remains essentially the same. He has left much of the dialogue related to the dangers of tyranny intact. Approaching the military hero Napoleon, both Min Ko and the Contemporary attempt to bring home to him man's plight in a post-atomic era. Frisch uses, both in 1947 and in 1955, almost identical words recorded in his Tagebuch (pp. 52-53). The Contemporary tells Napoleon:

Der nächste Krieg, den wir als unvermeidlich erklären, wird der letzte sein. . . . Die Sintflut ist herstellbar. Sie brauchen nur noch den Befehl zu geben Exzellenz. Das heißt: Wir stehen vor der Wahl, ob es eine Menschheit geben soll oder nicht. Wer aber, Exzellenz, hat diese Wahl zu treffen? die Menschheit selbst oder--Sie? . . . Wir können uns das Abenteuer der Alleinherrschaft nicht mehr leisten, . . . Wer heutzutage auf einem Thron sitzt, hat die Menschheit in der Hand.<sup>46</sup>

Later in the play, in the twentieth scene, the Contemporary repeats these same sentiments in a determined effort to persuade Hwang Ti that the limited tyranny once exercised by historical rulers like himself has now reached astounding and previously incomprehensible proportions.

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<sup>45</sup>Stücke I, p. 194. Frisch reminds us here again that we are often blind to actual circumstances around us. We only believe what we read. We rely on someone else to explain reality to us. This theme reappears in Biedermann und die Brandstifter.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., pp. 160-61. Compare with C.M. 1947, pp. 20, 33.

Wer heutzutage ein Tyrann ist, gleichgültig wo auf diesem Planeten, ist ein Tyrann über die gesamte Menschheit. Er hat (was in der Geschichte der Menschheit erstmalig ist), ein Mittel in der Hand, um sämtlichem Leben auf dieser Erde-- aus einem Bedürfnis heraus, das absurd erscheint, jedoch bei schweren Neurotikern nicht selten ist--den Garaus zu machen.<sup>47</sup>

He continues in this scene with a vivid description of the world after a massive atomic explosion, finishing with the words:

Asien, Europa, Amerika - bewußtlos! sinnlos! leblos!  
menschlos! gottlos!<sup>48</sup>

In the earlier edition, Min Ko gives a similar description to Philip II, but the vocabulary used by him is even more repulsive, and reminds one immediately of World War II, and the atrocities which were committed against mankind:

Ich sehe Stacheldraht, dahinter nichts als Stacheldraht, Skelette in Uniform; sie kauen die Wurzeln, wie wühlende Säue. Ich sehe einen Keller voll Ratten und Kinder, ... Kinder einer verhungerten Mutter. Was ist der Mensch? Er drängt sich zum dritten Mal, damit er endlich vergast werde, wie seine Mutter, wie seine Brüder; er sieht ihre Asche als Dünger.<sup>49</sup>

This allusion to actual events has been deleted in the revised edition, but Frisch gives the Contemporary speeches of equivalent poignancy in scene twenty, a scene which is completely dominated by his lengthy discourse on the fate awaiting the world, unless it dispenses with despotic rule. Ironically though, this attempt to aid the cause of truth is totally unsuccessful. Hwang Ti reacts to the Contemporary's words with:

<sup>47</sup>Stücke I, p. 231.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 234.

<sup>49</sup>C.M. 1947, p. 34.

Bravo ... Bravo! Das nenne ich Poesie!<sup>50</sup>

Complete misinterpretation of his efforts results in his being awarded the prize offered by the emperor to the poet who

...der Welt zu schildern vermag, was dieser Welt bevorsteht, wenn sie es wagen sollte, unser Feind zu sein...<sup>51</sup>

We must remember that, by this time, the Contemporary has assumed the role of court jester. Although he is permitted to express his opinions, no one takes him seriously. He, as court jester, has one designated function--to entertain those in power. He may say what he pleases, but this is received only as good and witty entertainment. His freedom of speech is therefore illusory. One can liken his position to left-wing writers in the west. Governments grant them a form of "Narrenfreiheit", being fully aware that their voices will go unheard. Consequently, censorship is not needed. Few people take writers seriously and they therefore remain totally ineffective. By transforming the Contemporary into the court jester, Frisch has given us a subtle critique of freedom of speech in the west.

The Contemporary, representing all intellectuals, is not willing to stand up for his convictions, to make a genuine effort to stop the torture of the innocent mute. Instead, he resorts to philosophizing, to merely proclaiming his convictions. In doing so, he shows us the total ineffectiveness of language and exposes it as a means of hiding the truth, rather than illuminating it. This theme was also treated

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<sup>50</sup>Stücke I, p. 234.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 235.

fully in Als der Krieg zu Ende war and is analyzed by Günter Waldmann who notes:

Die Stimme des Geistes hat nicht vermocht, der Wahrheit zur Geltung zu helfen, denn die Form, in der sie sich ausspricht, die Sprache, ist manipulierbar; im Gegenteil wurde sie ... zu einer Stärkung des Tyrannen.<sup>52</sup>

Although Frisch attempts to reduce this play to its bare theatrical structure, he does not reduce the weight and importance of the Contemporary's verbose comments on tyranny and its threat to the future of the world. In 1955, it is not the artist but the modern academic who is portrayed. Both are aware of their moral responsibility for the fate of others, but are not able to exemplify in action the ideals which they proclaim. It is not the dictators, but the intellectuals of today, whom Frisch criticizes. Theodore Ziolkowski recognizes the significance of this attack stating:

This is Frisch's particular tirade against the 'trahison des clercs' as he sees it: the feeling of the individual--the most essential relationship--had been lost as well as the sense of personal responsibility. ... This is the dilemma: knowledge, sophistication, "humanism" have destroyed our feeling for the human individual.<sup>53</sup>

At the end of the play, the Contemporary realizes that he has been a traitor to his own teachings and confronts Mee Lan with this verdict on himself:

Sieh mich an, den Ohnmächtigen!<sup>54</sup>

Earlier in the play, in the nineteenth scene, he openly admits his own

<sup>52</sup>"Das Verhängnis der Geschichtlichkeit", etc., p. 266.

<sup>53</sup>"Max Frisch, Moralist without a Moral", Yale French Studies, No. 29, 1962, p. 136.

<sup>54</sup>Stücke I, p. 244.

impotence in a society full of inhumanity:

Es gibt (vermutlich) keine einzige Stunde, da nicht ein Mensch gefoltert, geschunden, gemartert, geschändet, gemordet wird zu unsrer Zeit. ... Wir können Bücher schreiben und Reden halten, sogar mutige Reden: Warum es so nicht weitergehen kann! Und es geht weiter. ... Du hast recht, Mee Lan: die Achsel zucken und eine nächste Zigarette anzünden, das ist alles, was unsereiner zuzeiten vermag.<sup>55</sup>

The play is constructed in such a way that the abuse of the individual at the hands of the political machine begins all over again. This time the intellectual is the deaf-mute, the innocent individual oppressed by a tyrannical regime. "Nun bist du der Stumme ..." <sup>56</sup> says Mee Lan. With this final twist to the story, Frisch reiterates his belief that we learn nothing at all from our experiences. History repeats itself because we are cowards and therefore powerless to effect real change. The structure of this play is more than a dramatical trick intended merely as a defiance of classical tradition. Because it is circular, or at any rate non-linear, it reinforces Frisch's view that society will not change because the individuals who make up the collective political and social unit are essentially moral cowards. (The same cyclic structure can also be seen in Biedermann und die Brandstifter, and Andorra). The old regime of Hwang T1 has been overthrown, but the revolutionary faction under the young war-hero prince has established a new pattern of continuing tyranny, neglecting the plight of the individual just as the old emperor did. When his supporters are storming

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<sup>55</sup>Stücke I, p. 223.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., p. 245.

the palace, the prince remarks, while passing Mee Lan who has been molested by the mob:

Vorwärts! Wer die Welt erlöst, kümmert sich nicht um die  
einzelne Person! Vorwärts!<sup>57</sup>

Brutus, one of the peripheral characters, views this turn of events with astonishment:

Heißt dies Geschichte, daß der Unverstand  
Unsterblich wiederkehrt und triumphiert?<sup>58</sup>

He thought that tyranny had been destroyed when he murdered Caesar. Yet centuries later, it still exists. We have not advanced very far in the area of human understanding and brotherhood. That is Frisch's message.

The fact that the Contemporary's pleadings have been ignored by the stage characters does not mean that they are of secondary importance. The converse of this statement is true. Frisch makes the intellectual ineffective, just as he made Min Ko in the first version ineffective. This is done, though, so that their passivity may intensify and strengthen his message. Although Frisch views the pedagogic aspect of a work as an extra-literary device, as something to be avoided,<sup>59</sup> here, as in other plays, he is not capable of freeing his theatrical designs from his personal convictions. His personal theme is always more important to him than the primary exigencies of the theatre. Eduard Stäuble recognizes this tension in many of Frisch's

<sup>57</sup>Stücke I, p. 238.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., p. 244.

<sup>59</sup>"Rede an junge Lehrer", Neue Zürcher Zeitung, April 21, 1957.



dramatic efforts and cites this play as a notable example of it:

Frisch ist ein scharfer und klarer Denker. Im Erkennen und Formulieren brennender menschlicher Fragen liegt seine Stärke und Größe. Das Gewicht des Gedanklichen ist bei Frisch immer sehr groß. Es haftet Frisch so sehr an, daß er in seinen Bühnenstücken das Theatralische oft nicht immer einzuholen vermag.<sup>60</sup>

This play has been called a companion-piece to Thornton Wilder's Skin of Our Teeth.<sup>61</sup> While Wilder's play expresses distinct optimism, Frisch's drama gives a completely pessimistic appraisal of man's future and man's possibilities for constructive and responsible behavior. However, one small glimmer of hope still exists, not in the social or political sphere, but in the private world between man and woman, in the love between Mee Lan and the Contemporary, and between Romeo and Juliet. This has been noted by both Hellmuth Karasek<sup>62</sup> and Gerhard Kaiser.<sup>63</sup>

I have shown that, although Die Chinesische Mauer is structurally very different from either Nun singen sie wieder or Als der Krieg zu Ende war, it does contain some basic themes similar to those already discussed in both these war plays. Frisch presents them in a different context, in a different theatrical form, but does not change his attitude to them. The theatre is merely the medium through which

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<sup>60</sup>Max Frisch, Gesamtdarstellung seines Werkes (St. Gallen, 1967), p. 103.

<sup>61</sup>See Hans Bänziger, Frisch und Dürrenmatt. etc., p. 70.

<sup>62</sup>Frisch, etc., p. 38.

<sup>63</sup>In Über Max Frisch, Thomas Beckermann, ed; (Frankfurt a.M., 1971), p. 129.

he transmits his convictions to the public. The broad scope of this play has allowed Frisch a greater degree of objectivity than was possible in his other two plays of the forties. However, his personal sentiment is not completely obscured.

In the next play, Biedermann und die Brandstifter, Frisch returns once again to the German-Swiss scene, but this time achieves the objectivity which satire affords. This enables him to cut out sentimentality completely and gives his humanistic message the ring of conviction. Also, the delicate balance of stage craftsmanship and thematic concern, which is missing in Die Chinesische Mauer, is attained for the first time in this new play.

## Chapter V

### Biedermann und die Brandstifter

## INTRODUCTION TO CHAPTER V

Before I begin an analysis of Biedermann und die Brandstifter, which has been called "die zweite Etappe einer bewußten Entwicklung der 'Frisch-Dramaturgie', die sich von der Chinesischen Mauer bis zu Andorra hin erstreckt"<sup>1</sup>, a brief commentary on Frisch's activities in the early fifties will help bridge the gap between his last mentioned play and this latest one.

In 1950, after the short-lived success of Als der Krieg zu Ende war, Frisch decided to terminate his architectural career and devote all his time and energy to professional writing. On February 10, 1951, his fifth play Graf Öderland was staged in Zürich. It is one of his lesser known and perhaps most frequently misunderstood works and has received little recognition on foreign stages. It is, however, a product of Frisch's complex relationship to his homeland, and has been viewed as the counterpart to the Biedermann play.<sup>2</sup> Öderland's violent revolt against the stifling bureaucracy of middle-class society is a direct antithesis to Biedermann's blind social subservience. In the same year that Graf Öderland appeared--this play was revised again in 1956 and 1961--Frisch received a travel grant from the Rockefeller Foundation in New York and left Switzerland for a protracted visit to the United States and Mexico. Many of his experiences abroad are recorded in various journalistic articles

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<sup>1</sup>Manfred Jurgensen, Max Frisch.Die Dramen (Bern, 1968), p. 73.

<sup>2</sup>See Arnold Heidsieck, Das Groteske und das Absurde im modernen Drama (Stuttgart, 1969), pp. 75-76, and Hellmuth Karasek, Frisch (Velber, 1969), p. 67.

published in Swiss and German papers during and after his first American trip.<sup>3</sup> (He returned to the United States in 1956, but this time devoted his attention not to writing but to architectural observations.) The influence of America and Mexico on Frisch is obvious in his two major prose works of the fifties: Stiller (1954) and Homo Faber (1957). While still abroad, he began work on Stiller as well as on another play, Don Juan oder die Liebe zur Geometrie, which appeared in 1953, the same year as the Biedermann radio-play. Frisch's adaptation of the Don Juan saga immediately aroused public controversy;<sup>4</sup> many pious and conservative people were shocked by his frivolous portrayal of love, marriage and religion. Frisch admits, though, that this play was written solely for fun, as a comic experiment on stage.<sup>5</sup> Peter Demetz recognizes its theatrical merits calling it "the most lucid of recent German comedies".<sup>6</sup> Yet, one should not forget that the underlying theme of Don Juan--the forming of images and its relation to the problem of personal identity--is a very serious issue with Frisch, as we have already seen. He devotes an entire novel, Stiller, and a later play, Andorra, to a thorough and completely sober analysis of the same question.

His two novels of the fifties reveal an intensified criticism of the Swiss way of life. This began in the forties with Frisch's

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<sup>3</sup>See "Amerikanisches Picknick", Süddeutsche Zeitung, Aug. 3, 1951; "Der Lord und die verzückten Neger", Süddeutsche Zeitung, Sept. 8, 1951; "Unsere Arroganz gegenüber Amerika", Neue Schweizer Rundschau, N.F. XX, 1952/53, pp. 584ff.; "Mexiko", Süddeutsche Zeitung, May, 5, 1954.

<sup>4</sup>See Ulrich Weisstein, Max Frisch (New York, 1967), p. 136.

<sup>5</sup>See "Daten und Nachträgliches zu Don Juan," Stücke II, p. 321.

<sup>6</sup>Post-war German Literature (New York, 1970), p. 124.

expressed disapproval of the Swiss self-righteous attitude to war guilt. The scope of his social criticism broadens in the fifties and sixties; his outspoken attacks on Swiss society include: pamphlets denouncing proposed building plans for Zürich,<sup>7</sup> public declamation of smug Swiss conservatism,<sup>8</sup> and continual exposé of the plight of the foreign worker caught up in a Swiss 'democratic' capitalistic system.<sup>9</sup> Stiller and Homo Faber are products of Frisch's personal grievances against Switzerland. Less obvious are the tenuous allusions to the ills of contemporary Swiss society built into Graf Öderland, (the figure of the bank teller sitting behind bars as if in a prison, reference to work as a virtuous activity, "als Ersatz für die Freude" (Stücke I, p. 306), mentioned previously in his Tagebuch, pp. 57, 90) and Biedermann und die Brandstifter. However, because these references are so very subtle in both plays, they are often missed altogether by foreign audiences with no knowledge of Frisch's other works. Critics too, are not always aware of the insinuated national disparagement in both above mentioned plays, and also in Andorra, discussed in the last chapter.

Frisch's two novels of the fifties won him international

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<sup>7</sup>"Cum grano Salis", Werk, XL, x, 1953, pp. 325ff.; "Achtung die Schweiz", Basler politische Schriften, No. 3, (Basel, 1956).

<sup>8</sup>"Festrede" (1956) in Öffentlichkeit als Partner (Frankfurt, 1967), pp. 7-14.

<sup>9</sup>"Überfremdung I und Überfremdung II" in Öffentlichkeit als Partner, pp. 100-35. See also the scathing footnotes in his recently published satire Wilhelm Tell für die Schule (Frankfurt, 1971), especially pp. 78-80.

recognition, but also aroused much negative reaction from his countrymen. Biedermann und die Brandstifter was well received both in Europe and abroad, perhaps because it was not wholly understood. By utilizing comedy and by distancing himself from the issues underlying the play, Frisch inadvertently caused interpretative confusion. This play, however, shows a marked development in Frisch's dramatic career. His concern for the individual progresses to concern for society as a whole.

Biedermann und die Brandstifter



Frisch's Biedermann und die Brandstifter appeared as a stage play in 1958 and had its first performance on March 29th. of the same year at the Zürcher Schauspielhaus, directed by Oscar Wälterlin . However, the thematic beginnings of the play can be traced back to a prose sketch in his Tagebuch, "Burleske", written in 1948. The Biedermann story was further developed as a radio play in 1953, and it was this version which provided the immediate 'working material' for the subsequent theater-piece. In his published conversation with Horst Bienek, Frisch tells how he came to write the stage rendition:

Der 'Biedermann' hat eine lustige Geschichte. Erschöpft vom 'Homo Faber', der eben fertig war, fühlte ich mich nicht fähig, sogleich an das große Stück vom andorranischen Juden zu gehen. Auch hatte ich lange nicht für die Bühne geschrieben, Fingerübung war vonnöten. So nahm ich das Hörspiel, um zwei Monate lang meine Fingerübung zu machen, die dann über 70 deutsche und viele fremdsprachige Bühnen ging; ich habe nicht damit gerechnet, daß ich von diesem Haarölschwindler leben werde.<sup>10</sup>

The success of this play is well documented in numerous theatrical reviews.<sup>11</sup> Critics and audiences, however, do not concur on how Frisch intended the play to be interpreted.

Two critics, Hans Bänziger<sup>12</sup> and Hellmuth Karasek<sup>13</sup> point out that Biedermann is directed at Swiss audiences in particular, but Karasek does admit that this intent is not satisfactorily explicit in

<sup>10</sup>Werkstattgespräche mit Schriftstellern (München, 1962) p. 28.

<sup>11</sup>See Elly Wilbert-Collins, A Bibliography of Four Contemporary German-Swiss Authors (Bern, 1967) pp. 41-51.

<sup>12</sup>Frisch and Dürrenmatt (Bern, 1960), p. 102

<sup>13</sup>Frisch (Velber, 1969), pp. 66-68.

the play itself. He refers back to the radio script to support his argument. In it, Frisch openly speaks of the "Brand von Seldwyla"<sup>14</sup> to describe the results of the arsonists' criminal antics. Even if Frisch had included this direct allusion to Switzerland in the 1958 stage version, I doubt non-Swiss audiences, without knowledge of Gottfried Keller's works, would make the necessary analogy. The many references to the "Föhn" (Stücke II, pp. 126, 134, 143, 151), a wind factor peculiar to the German-Swiss region, are also lost on an audience not versed in this alpine weather phenomenon and the apparent psychosomatic effect it can have on people exposed to it. Of course, in translation, its purpose in the play is lost completely. 'South wind', in English, conveys none of the connotations of the German "Föhn". The chorus of ever-ready but never-called firemen can be interpreted as reference to Switzerland's large armed forces, but again, detailed information about present day Swiss society would seem a necessary prerequisite for this analogy. Although Frisch may well have intended this play for a Swiss public in particular, I doubt that was his sole intent. The epilogue, we know, was written for its first performance in Germany, at Frankfurt, Biedermann having been performed previously in Switzerland along with Die große Wut des Philip Hotz. (Biedermann alone was considered too short for a full-length evening at the theatre). The scene in hell is aimed more at the German bourgeoisie--the cries of "Wiedergutmachung"--than at the Swiss. In fact, the play itself is not merely concerned with Swiss or German problems, but with more universal issues which are a matter of personal conscience. Carol Petersen calls it "eine

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<sup>14</sup> Hellmuth Karasek, Frisch, etc., p. 67.

allgemeine Zeitsatire",<sup>15</sup> Ulrich Weisstein views it as "an individual's struggle with his conscience or, more precisely, with his bad conscience"<sup>16</sup> and Theodore Ziolkowski concludes that:

... it is Frisch's indictment of stupidity, psychological blindness, and moral cowardice in any sphere of activity.<sup>17</sup>

Viewed in these general terms, Biedermann und die Brandstifter can be classified as a sequel to Die Chinesische Mauer.

Both plays contain characters who eventually become victims of their own social and personal non-commitment. Gottlieb Biedermann, like the Contemporary, implicates himself in the impending disaster by his continual passive condonement of the arsonists' activities. Yet, his abstention is decidedly different from the Contemporary's in two essential ways. Firstly, while the Contemporary is representative of a particular group, intellectuals in general, and is not meant to be interpreted as an individual, but a type, Biedermann, on the other hand, is given a name and a personal identity. Secondly, to the end, Biedermann remains totally unaware of his own personal guilt. He maintains that had he, one individual, not cooperated, the results would have been no different:

Alle haben Streichhölzchen gegeben. Fast alle! Sonst wäre nicht die ganze Stadt niedergebrannt, ... Wenn wir, du und ich, keine Streichhölzchen gegeben hätten, du meinst, das

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<sup>15</sup>Max Frisch (Berlin, 1966), p. 76.

<sup>16</sup>Max Frisch (New York, 1967), p. 145.

<sup>17</sup>"Max Frisch: Moralist without a Moral", Yale French Studies No. 29, 1962, p. 140.

hätte irgend etwas geändert an dieser Katastrophe?<sup>18</sup>

In this sense, Biedermann is the counter-type to the Contemporary.

He feels he is the innocent victim of circumstances beyond his control:

... wir sind Opfer. ... Wir haben alles verloren. ... Dabei  
sind wir schuldlos.<sup>19</sup>

He absolves himself of personal guilt by propounding the theory of collective guilt. Some critics have drawn historical comparisons to Biedermann's argument. Bänziger,<sup>20</sup> Martin Esslin,<sup>21</sup> Hellmuth Karasek<sup>22</sup> and Ulrich Weisstein<sup>23</sup> are among those who relate it to the uncurbed infiltration of communists into the Benés regime of Czechoslovakia resulting in complete communist control in 1948, (Frisch mentions this in his Tagebuch in an excerpt found immediately before the prose sketch "Burleske" ), the rise of the Nazi party in Germany culminating in the horrors of World War II, and lastly, continued public acquiescence to the hoarding of atomic weapons. Yet, Biedermann is, strictly speaking, not a political play.<sup>24</sup> The manufacturer of hair tonic, in his blind and smug passivity, is not just an individual, but represents modern man in general, unwilling and unable to make personal decisions, always relying on others to inform and direct him, thus freeing himself

<sup>18</sup>Stücke II, p. 331.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 326.

<sup>20</sup>Frisch und Dürrenmatt, etc., p. 100.

<sup>21</sup>Das Theater des Absurden (Frankfurt, 1967), 2nd. ed., p. 284.

<sup>22</sup>Max Frisch, etc., p. 75.

<sup>23</sup>Max Frisch, etc., pp. 143, 144.

<sup>24</sup>See Carol Petersen, op. cit., p. 76, also Hans Bänziger, op. cit., p. 99.

from responsibility for his own actions. At the end of scene three the chorus comments:

Der, um zu wissen, was droht,  
Zeitungen liest  
Täglich zum Frühstück entrüstet  
Über ein fernes Ereignis,  
Täglich beliefert mit Deutung,  
Die ihm das eigene Sinnen erspart,  
Täglich erfahrend, was gestern geschah,  
Schwerlich durchschaut er, was eben geschieht  
Unter dem eigenen Dach:-<sup>25</sup>

Here, Frisch draws on a fundamental theme which runs through all of his works of the forties and fifties, and appears again in Andorra (1961). In the words of Stiller: "Wir leben in einem Zeitalter der Reproduktion."<sup>26</sup> The effect of the mass media on the minds of the public has been discussed already in Chapters II and III. Biedermann, too, lives in a world of clichés, like the characters in Nun singen sie wieder and Horst in Als der Krieg zu Ende war. He himself has become a cliché, the image of accepted middle-class values. He is a dehumanized being, totally swayed by outside influences and imprisoned in his own world of material possessions. Adelheid Weise interprets him as the alienated middle-class citizen of industrialized and mechanized society, living solely for his own gain:

Die Entfremdung des Bürgers wird in Biedermann verkörpert als eine bewußte Verantwortungslosigkeit gegenüber sich selbst und seinen Mitmenschen. Biedermann identifiziert sich mit seinem Besitz, er verdinglicht sich. Seine Beziehung zur Welt ist dem Prinzip der Nützlichkeit unterworfen. ... Biedermann weiß nicht, daß das Wesen des Menschen darin besteht, sich auf Grund seiner ethischen Freiheit selbst zu wählen. Er ist unwissend, weil er nicht wissen will. Er fühlt sich wohl in seiner Bewußtlosigkeit,

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<sup>25</sup>Stücke II, p. 120.

<sup>26</sup>Stiller (Frankfurt, Hamburg: Fischer Bücherei, 1965), p. 141.

denn dieser Zustand scheint ihn der Entscheidungspflicht zu entheben.<sup>27</sup>

(Biedermann's attachment to his material possessions will be discussed later.) Frisch emphasizes relentlessly in his previous works that decision-making and the consequences of those decisions are the responsibility of each individual. Karl in Nun singen sie wieder and the Contemporary in Die Chinesische Mauer both were aware of this essential principle. In this play, as well as his next one, Andorra, non-involvement does not free one from guilt.

Frisch labels Biedermann "Ein Lehrstück ohne Lehre",-- reminding us of the theatrical parables of Bertolt Brecht. This subtitle could well have been used for Die Chinesische Mauer, for as we saw in the previous chapter, the characters in that play appear to have learned nothing at all from their experiences and the farcical action begins again at the end of the play. The same is true of the Biedermann story. The arsonists who are devils in disguise, close down hell for lack of customers--all of the major criminals have been admitted to heaven--and return to earth to begin their pyromaniacal pranks again:

Chor: -die Hölle ist gelöscht.

Figur: Hast du Streichhölzer?

Belzzebub: Immer das gleiche!

Figur: Man wird sie uns schenken ... Hier werden keine Seelen mehr angenommen. Sagen Sie den braven

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<sup>27</sup>Untersuchungen zur Thematik und Struktur der Dramen von Max Frisch (Göppingen, 1970), p. 94.

Leuten, die Hölle streikt. Und wenn ein Engel uns sucht, sagen Sie, wir sind auf der Erde.<sup>28</sup>

Thus the repetitive pattern is maintained, and once more, unmistakable signs of danger evoke merely a silent vigil. Biedermann thinks he and his wife have been saved:

Babbette: Glaubst du, wir sind gerettet?

Biedermann: -ich glaub schon ...<sup>29</sup>

but as Dr. Henri Plard shows, he is saved only in his own interpretation of the word:

... so kehrte Biedermann--vom Himmel wie von der streikenden Hölle verstoßen--wieder auf die Erde zurück, begleitet von zwei Teufeln, die sich zu der wiederaufgebauten Stadt begeben, der neue Brände bevorstehen. ... Er ist 'gerettet', in dem flachen und oberflächlichen Sinn, den das Wort für ihn hat. Von der Hölle freigekommen, ist er dazu verurteilt, ewig dem Dämon Streichhölzer hinzuhalten und niemals er selbst zu sein.<sup>30</sup>

Unlike Brecht, Frisch does not suggest a moral, but leaves the audience to ponder over what they have viewed on stage. By using this method of dramatic communication, he becomes what Eduard Stäuble calls a "heimlicher Moralist" because:

Er will die Gesellschaft beunruhigen über die Lüge, zu der wir unser Leben gemacht haben.<sup>31</sup>

Frisch hopes that the realization of what he is demonstrating will come to the individual through personal reflection. Yet, he realizes too

<sup>28</sup>Stücke II, p. 343.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 344

<sup>30</sup>"Der Dramatiker Max Frisch und sein Werk für das Theater der Gegenwart", Universitas, XIX, ix, (1964), p. 911.

<sup>31</sup>Max Frisch. Gesamtdarstellung seines Werkes (St. Gallen, 1967), p. 29.

the risks involved in using this 'open model' method. Unless the public does see itself portrayed in the characters on stage, the model remains totally ineffective.<sup>32</sup>

Running parallel to Biedermann's involvement with the arsonists, who have 'set up shop' in the attic of his house, is a subsidiary story which forms a background receiving only occasional prominence in the play. This is the Knechtling episode. It has no immediate function in the main story-line, but gives us a more detailed picture of the kind of person Biedermann really is. On the surface he appears to be a fellow of goodwill believing in humanitarian principles. He tells the arsonists; "ich bin kein Ummensch"<sup>33</sup> and reminds the audience: "man muß auch ein bißchen Vertrauen haben,"<sup>34</sup> "was wir brauchen, das ist Menschlichkeit, Brüderlichkeit."<sup>35</sup> Even his wife Babette believes her husband to be "zu gutmütig".<sup>36</sup> However, when we are informed that he has driven the discoverer of the hair tonic, from which he now makes a substantial living, to suicide, because he refuses to allow Knechtling a share of the sales, Biedermann exposes himself as a true "Ummensch". Outwardly, he appears to be a man of virtue and moral stature; inwardly he is a

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<sup>32</sup>Both Hans Bänziger, Frisch und Dürrenmatt, etc., p. 104, and Ulrich Weisstein, Max Frisch, etc., pp. 144-145, note that in the prose sketch and the radio play, Biedermann is explicitly everyone. This is achieved by using the "du" form in the Tagebuch sketch and speaking of "Biedermann in uns selbst" in the radio script.

<sup>33</sup>Stücke II, pp. 92, 100.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 104.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 137.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., pp. 104, 135.



ruthless, unfeeling greedy business man. He suffers from this dichotomy. Because he is bothered by his own conscience, he falls prey to the arsonists' plans. His own involvement in the Knechtling suicide prevents him from informing the police of his suspicions surrounding the men whom he has taken into his home. Weisstein elaborates on this theme of bad conscience concluding:

Thus it is shown that Biedermann's charity is all but Christian. In playing up to Schmitz and Eisenring, he seeks to persuade himself and the world, that being such a man, he could not possibly be responsible for the death of his former employee Knechtling. ... What makes Biedermann helpless against the intruders is his realization that if he did not cater to their whims, he could be accused of not being an 'homme de bonne volonté'.<sup>37</sup>

Also as a side issue, Frisch includes his now familiar figure of the intellectual in the personages of this play. The part given him is indeed small, but not totally insignificant, especially to someone already acquainted with Frisch's previous works. He is the third member of the scheming trio, an academic man possessing a Doctor-of-Philosophy degree. (We are reminded here that the Contemporary in Die Chinesische Mauer held a Doctor-of-Law degree). He joins Eisenring and Schmitz in the attic of the Biedermann home shortly before the end of the fourth scene. From the beginning, his part in the arsonists' plans remains questionable and uncertain. The other two fire-bugs are none too happy about having him as an accomplice. Eisenring makes this clear:

Ich frage mich manchmal, Doktor, was du eigentlich machst bei uns, wenn du keine Freude hast an Feuersbrünsten, an Funken und prasselnden Flammen, ... Weltverbesserer! ...

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<sup>37</sup>Max Frisch, etc., p. 145.

Ich mag euch Akademiker nicht, ... euresgleichen ist immer  
so ideologisch, immer so ernst, bis es reicht zum Verrat--  
's ist keine rechte Freude dabei.<sup>38</sup>

When the unnamed Dr. Phil. realizes that his partners do not share his idealism and that they are playing anarchic pranks solely for fun, he washes his hands of the whole matter and defects from their ranks. This is symbolically shown in the play when he leaves the stage and sits in the audience just as the fiery pandemonium breaks loose. He has just presented Biedermann with a document in which he states the reasons for his change of mind, and openly declares: "ich distanzriere mich ... ich war ein Weltverbesserer, ein ernster und ehrlicher, ich habe alles gewußt ... nur das eine nicht: Die machen es aus purer Lust!"<sup>39</sup> Biedermann, however, does not comprehend the academic's attempted warning. He looks at the written message just handed him and asks lamely: "Herr Doktor, was soll ich damit?"<sup>40</sup> Here again we have Frisch's portrayal of the ineffectiveness of the intellectual who, for purely ideological reasons, bows out and remains on the side-lines. Instead of committing himself to active prevention of the fire-bugs' plans, once aware of the impending disaster, he chooses the medium of the written word to convey his disapproval. (The Contemporary resorts to the spoken word). This last effort is a futile one because language itself is an ineffective medium. S. P. Hoefert interprets Biedermann's

<sup>38</sup>Stücke II, pp. 133-134.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 155.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 155.

disregard of the Dr. Phil.'s message in this way:

Auch hier wird also wieder die Ohnmacht des Wortes in anschaulicher Weise vorgeführt.<sup>41</sup>

and Hellmuth Karasek sees in the academic a:

... Parabelfigur des geistigen Wegbereiters der Macht ... der in Worten den Terror mit vorbereitete und jetzt, da er Wirklichkeit geworden, entsetzt und wirkungslos gegen ihn protestiert: so hatte er nicht gewollt.<sup>42</sup>

The academic personifies the political agitator who retreats when he begins to realize the results of his agitation. In Frisch's earlier plays, we saw the intellectual who did not get involved, who felt that politics and intellectual activity should be kept separate. Frisch condemned this attitude at that time. Now he shows us the opposite extreme. A learned man commits himself to a political cause, anxious to change conditions in the world, only to discover that his political associates are more interested in revolutionary change than in real improvement. His influence therefore remains negligible. It seems here that Frisch has now changed his views concerning the relationship between art and politics, between intellectualism and politics. It is as if he is now supporting the view that politics is "das Niedrige, womit der geistige Mensch ... sich nicht beschmutzen soll,"<sup>43</sup> a view which he had previously criticized. He points out in 1958 that intellectuals often become the pawns of political activists. Their advice and influence is either manipulated and distorted to serve a political cause, or it is totally ignored. Either way, it appears that politics and intellectualism do not mix. Frisch's views have become more moderate and realistic.

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<sup>41</sup>"Zur Sprachauffassung Max Frischs", Muttersprache, No. 73, 1963, p. 259.

<sup>42</sup>Frisch, etc., p. 74.

<sup>43</sup>Öffentlichkeit als Partner (Frankfurt am Main, 1967), pp. 21-22.

When one analyzes the thematic groundwork of this play, another very important issue comes to light: the emphasis Frisch places on the question of class distinction. This social commentary was not a part of the Tagebuch sketch, but was introduced into the Biedermann story in the radio-play. The two arsonists, Schmitz and Eisenring, represent the lower strata of society, the unfortunate and exploited working masses, while Biedermann, on the other hand, embodies the well-to-do industrialist. Even Eisenring is seen on a higher social scale than his cohort. At least he has worked in elegant restaurants and is acquainted with the way of life of the rich. Schmitz, though, is the homeless, mannerless reprobate, brought up in an orphanage and educated in a circus. He uses his story of sorrow to soften Babette's opinion of him:

Woher soll unsereiner ein Benehmen haben. Hungern und frieren, Madame, das macht mir nichts, aber--keine Bildung, Madame, kein Benehmen, Madame, keine Kultur ...<sup>44</sup>

Biedermann, too, not wishing to offend the 'guests' in his home, begins to treat them like his equals, proclaiming emphatically:

Ich glaube nicht an Klassenunterschiede! ...ich bin nicht altmodisch. Im Gegenteil. ... Sind wir denn heutzutage nicht alle, ob arm oder reich, Geschöpfe eines gleichen Schöpfers? Auch der Mittelstand. Sind wir, Sie und ich, nicht Menschen aus Fleisch und Blut?<sup>45</sup>

(These words remind us of Agnes' lengthy discourse before Stepan in Als der Krieg zu Ende war).<sup>46</sup> Later, when he decides to invite both

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<sup>44</sup>Stücke II, p. 108.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., pp. 129-130,

<sup>46</sup>Stücke I, pp. 270-71.

men to dinner with himself and his wife, Biedermann informs the maid,

Anna:

Die beiden Herren sollen sich wie zu Haus fühlen.<sup>47</sup>

He instructs her to remove all the usual china, silver, and crystal from the dinner table and to serve a simple meal, without trappings.

Anna herself is not to appear in uniform but is to act as if she belongs to the family. His instructions to her include:

Nur keine Klassenunterschiede!<sup>48</sup>

Es wird nicht serviert. Unter keinen Umständen! Sie kommen herein, ohne zu klopfen, einfach herein und stellen die Pfanne einfach auf den Tisch--<sup>49</sup>

The falsity of all this is underscored by our knowledge of his treatment of Knechtling. Biedermann believes in social differences; his humanitarian statements have one goal in mind--ingratiation, not true brotherhood. The swift manner in which all the items removed from sight reappear during the meal throws a completely farcical light on Biedermann's concern for simplicity and unpretentiousness.

Middle-class values are further exposed in Biedermann's angry reaction to public meddling in his private affairs. The chorus, modeled on the ancient Greek chorus and therefore also representing the city,<sup>50</sup> attempts to awaken Biedermann to what is actually occurring in his house. He reminds them:

Meine Herren, ich bin freier Bürger. Ich kann denken was

<sup>47</sup>Stücke II, p. 136.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 137.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 138.

<sup>50</sup>Weisstein, op. cit., p. 149.

ich will. ... Was unter meinem Dach geschieht--ich muß schon sagen, schließlich und endlich bin ich der Hauseigentümer!<sup>51</sup>

The prevalent attitude of non-involvement in the affairs of one's neighbours is unmasked here and shown to be dangerous. This middle-class morality is mocked by the chorus in its scathing commentary:

Heilig sei Heiliges uns,  
Eigentum,  
Was auch entstehe daraus,  
Nimmerzulöschendes einst,  
Das uns dann alle versengt und verkohlt:  
Heilig sei Heiliges uns!<sup>52</sup>

Although the middle class is the prime object of Frisch's criticism, Manfred Jurgensen has misjudged Frisch's intent when he attempts to align this play with Brecht's pro-communist dramas.<sup>53</sup> Frisch imitated Brecht's methods, but he most certainly was not swayed by Brecht's Marxist ideology, as Jurgensen would have us believe. Frisch's social criticism is only one aspect of the play. We should remember that the original Biedermann prose sketch, from which both the radio-play and the stage version evolved, contained no social framework. I therefore feel that Jurgensen's following statements much exaggerate the issues:

Der Untergang des Bürgertums muß als unmittelbar der thematischen Auseinandersetzung des Stückes zugehörig betrachtet werden.<sup>54</sup>  
Der Vorwurf einer sozialpolitischen Schuld des Bürgertums zeigt wiederum den deutlichen Einfluß Bertolt Brechts.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>51</sup>Stücke II, p. 122.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

<sup>53</sup>See Max Frisch Die Dramen, etc., pp. 66-79.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 66.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 79.

A more credible thematic similarity between this play and Brecht's theatre is discussed by Arnold Heidsieck. He relates it to Brecht's Mahagonny because here as in Biedermann:

Die Menschen selber bereiten sich die Katastrophe. ...<sup>56</sup>  
and: Nicht der Hurrikan, das blinde Naturschicksal, wird entfesselt, sondern der von Menschen selber entzündete Weltbrand.<sup>57</sup>

Both plays are arguments against the blind acceptance of fate.<sup>58</sup> Both show that man is capable of his own destruction and is therefore also responsible for his own salvation.

The audience's visual attention is attracted and held by a continual accumulation of diverse objects on stage. These objects are not merely part of the décor, the background scenery, but have a significant function in that they help convey the play's intent. The use of a split-level stage structure allows the audience to view simultaneously the amassing of the ignescent arsenal, the stark reality of the barrels filled with gasoline on the one hand, and Biedermann's comfortable and complacent 'nouveau riche' life surrounded by his material possessions on the other. These objects have become his 'cultural' possessions. This is made clear in the ludicrous sixth scene, in Biedermann's dining room, when Eisenring asks for the very articles which Biedermann has taken care to hide from sight: the white linen table cloth, finger bowls,

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<sup>56</sup>Das Groteske und das Absurde im modernen Drama, etc., p. 95.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., p. 98.

<sup>58</sup>See Jurgensen, op. cit., p. 78. "Auch für ihn [Frisch] hat es heute keinen Sinn mehr, vom allmächtigen und unerklärlichen Schicksal zu sprechen."

the silver and crystal dinner-ware, etc. He then remarks how pleasant it is to be exposed to 'culture' once again after a term in prison:

Wenn man aus dem Gefängnis kommt, wissen Sie, Monate lang ohne Kultur--Weißt du, was das ist? ... Das ist Damast.<sup>59</sup>

In his earlier plays, Frisch had unmasked what he calls "eine ästhetische Kultur"; here he exposes a materialistic 'culture', but this time not merely by having his stage characters speak about it, but by presenting it before our eyes. The physical stage environment demonstrates Biedermann's concern with material possessions rather than with moral values.

At the end of the play, before the epilogue in hell begins, the stage is completely bare, except for a few pieces of charred furniture. This barrenness symbolizes Biedermann's empty and wasted life and is conspicuously contrasted with the luxury which we viewed earlier. As a member of the industrialist-capitalist society, Biedermann has surrounded himself with material possessions which become the most important things in his life. His whole view of life is rooted in these objects of comfort and luxury. Without them, he cannot function. When he finds himself in hell, he demands compensation for his destroyed home, claiming continually that he and his wife cannot be held responsible for the catastrophe. They remark how uncomfortable and out-of-place they both feel in such surroundings. Babette comments that it is like being "in einer Siedlung"<sup>60</sup> and that "Das ist unsereins nicht gewohnt".<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup>Stücke II, p. 143.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., p. 324.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid.



Their thoughts are again directed towards their physical environment and not towards the more important question of guilt and morality.

Several analogies can be drawn from this scene. There are obvious similarities to the behavior of the German middle-class after the war, who claimed that they could not be held responsible for the actions of a fanatic, and therefore demanded "Wiedergutmachung".<sup>62</sup> Also, Frisch is exposing the value system of his own capitalistic country. Switzerland has become one of the most highly industrialized countries of Europe. All emphasis is placed on production and profit, and the Swiss are known to be efficient and often ruthless businessmen. Swiss society, in Frisch's view, is too materialistically oriented. Too much emphasis is placed on 'wordly' possessions, on physical comfort and financial security. Morals--the distinction between right and wrong--often take second place. This is evident in the play in the reversed roles of heaven and hell.

The lack of dramatic tension in the play, noted by Weisstein<sup>63</sup> and Bänziger,<sup>64</sup> is compensated by Frisch's clever use of black humor. A verbal conflict, or at least a verbal rift, exists between Biedermann and the arsonists; his statements are barefaced lies while theirs are equally blatant truths. Biedermann is not accustomed to honesty and truthfulness and therefore interprets all that the arsonists say as friendly jokes.

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<sup>62</sup>Stücke II, p. 330.

<sup>63</sup>Max Frisch, etc., p. 183, Note 50.

<sup>64</sup>Frisch und Dürrenmatt, etc., p. 101.

Biedermann: Was ist in diesen Fässern?

Eisenring: Benzin

Biedermann: Machen Sie keine Witze!<sup>65</sup>

When Biedermann is informed by Eisenring that Schmitz has been sent out to purchase some spun-wood shavings because:

Holzwohle trägt die Funken am weitesten.<sup>66</sup>

we are told that he "lacht höflich wie über einen schwachen Witz."<sup>67</sup>

Biedermann thinks he is playing their witty game and praises himself for his sense of humour:

Nicht alle, mein Freund, nicht alle haben soviel Humor wie ich!<sup>68</sup>

He does not recognize the bare truth even when he meets it face to face. The arsonists realize this and of course use Biedermann's lack of perception to further their own ends. Eisenring even admits to him: "Wir sind Brandstifter."<sup>69</sup> and his partner adds: "Warum glauben Sie uns nicht?"<sup>70</sup> only to receive the expected reply:

Ich halte Sie ja nicht für Brandstifter, meine Herren, das ist nicht wahr, Sie tun mir Unrecht, ich halte Sie ... für meine--Freunde.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>65</sup>Stücke II, p. 116.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., p. 127.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., p. 131.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., p. 151.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., p. 152.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid.

This ridiculous state of affairs only supports what Eisenring tells Biedermann earlier in the play:

Scherz ist die drittbeste Tarnung. Die zweitbeste: Sentimentalität. ... Aber die beste und sicherste Tarnung (finde ich) ist immer noch die blanke und nackte Wahrheit. Komischerweise. Die glaubt niemand.<sup>72</sup>

The characters speak past each other, not to each other, reflecting Frisch's interest in and concern for man's obvious embroilment in his own affairs and man's indifference to what is occurring around him.

This play shows at last that Frisch has mastered the fine art of demonstrating, not just telling. He matches his personal involvement in moral and social issues with a skillful dramaturgy and utilizes the many techniques and resources of the theatre which he had previously ignored. For this reason, Biedermann und die Brandstifter has enjoyed more than a decade of continued success both on German-speaking and foreign stages. Not just the issues presented, but also the means used to present them, force the audience to question and re-question the habits and impulses which make up their own lives. The diversity of themes analyzed in this play assures varied interpretations. There seems to be something for everyone: moral issues centring around the distinction between, good, evil and humane behavior; the question of cowardice, fear and subsequent procrastination; political implications, especially in the epilogue; an attack on present day materialism; the problem of personal and collective guilt; and the question of man's responsibility for his own fate.

Peter Demetz is one of the very few critics who express

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<sup>72</sup>Stücke II, p. 128.

dissatisfaction with this play. His argument that "Frisch relies on a style not entirely his own",<sup>73</sup> is surely an attempt to arouse controversy. I don't think that Frisch deliberately tried to write like Brecht and Dürrenmatt, as Demetz argues. That he learned much about the theatre from both playwrights cannot be denied. Only in the fifties did he begin to get the feel of the theatre, so to speak, and accordingly incorporated this new outlook and understanding of the dramatic medium into his own works. What we see in Biedermann is not "an alien style [used] as his crutch"<sup>74</sup> but a new, reinvigorated dramaturgy which is continued in his next play Andorra. As Hans Bänziger notes: this play is one of the "Wegmarken der ... Meisterjahre"<sup>75</sup> in contrast to the plays of the forties which belong to Frisch's "Lehrjahre".

Frisch begins to experiment in this play with the open model form of theatrical presentation. This is further developed in his next play Andorra. In doing so, he played down the individuality of Biedermann, and once more, this character, like others whom Frisch has created, becomes a general type. Social implications take priority over individual characterizations.<sup>76</sup> In Andorra, however, Frisch manages to fuse both. Social behavior becomes an extension of personal behavior.

<sup>73</sup>Postwar German Literature, etc., p. 119.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., p. 121.

<sup>75</sup>Frisch und Dürrenmatt, etc., p. 108.

<sup>76</sup>See Erich Franzen, Formen des modernen Dramas (Munich, 1961), p. 98.

## Chapter VI

### Andorra

Immediately after the completion of Biedermann und die Brandstifter in 1958, Frisch turned to "das große Stück vom andorranischen Juden". He now felt ready to create a theatrical version of the prose sketch "Der andorranische Jude" written more than a decade earlier and recorded in his Tagebuch in 1946. We know that as early as 1957 he was considering the stage potential of this story, but decided at that time to write the Biedermann play first, as he had not produced anything for the theatre for several years and wished to 'get back into practice' again with a less arduous work.<sup>1</sup> (He completed the Biedermann play in two months.) His progress with Andorra, however, was very slow, but he worked intermittently on the play for three years and eventually the fifth and final version appeared in the fall of 1961. In his published interview with Horst Bienek, Frisch tells of his renewed interest in the theme of the Andorran Jew, and remarks "daß das ein großer Stoff ist, so groß, daß er mir Angst machte, Lust und Angst zugleich--vor allem aber ... sah ich, daß dieser Stoff mein Stoff ist."<sup>2</sup>

The play was first performed in Zurich on three consecutive evenings: November 1, 2, 3, 1961, and immediately thereafter was performed frequently on numerous stages both in Switzerland and Germany. Its popularity was immediate; its reception, on the other hand, not always favourable. The Swiss theatre public, at least, were aware that a new play from Frisch was forthcoming and were also not ignorant

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<sup>1</sup>See 'Programs of the Züricher Schauspielhaus,' No. 7, 1961/62. pp.3ff. Quoted, in trans., in Ulrich Weisstein, Max Frisch (New York, 1967), p. 157.

<sup>2</sup>Werkstattgespräche mit Schriftstellern (München, 1962), p. 28.

of its general thematic material.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, considerable curiosity had been aroused long before the play was ready to be staged. Henning Rischbieter writes of the "Spannung, Erwartung und Neugier" which was evident among the public before the curtains rose on Andorra for the first time.<sup>4</sup> By 1961, Frisch was a controversial figure in Switzerland, mostly because of his extra-literary activities, his open criticism of his homeland. He had moved to Rome a year earlier, but returned to Zürich to attend the rehearsals of Andorra, during which final changes in and additions to the text and stage production were made.<sup>5</sup> When Frisch arrived in Zürich, public curiosity concerning his new play was intensified and people rushed to book seats for the première. Public reaction was then and still is mixed. On the surface, the play appears simple enough, yet the profound issues raised by it, and the continuing debate concerning Andorra's manifold interpretations, prove the contrary.

This conflict of opinion, though, centers on how one ought to interpret the play, on the author's intent, and not on its theatrical qualities. Critics tend to agree that Andorra is a splendid example of "total theatre", that it marks a climatic point in Frisch's dramatic career. Even Friedrich Torberg, who criticizes Frisch's portrayal of anti-Semitism, admits that "--the Swiss dramatist has written a supremely important play, one of the most important to be written in the German language since 1945".<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Hans Bänziger makes reference to it in Frisch und Dürrenmatt (Bern, 1960), p. 113.

<sup>4</sup>"Andorra von Max Frisch in Zürich", Theater Heute, V, ii, No. 12, 1961, p. 10.

<sup>5</sup>See "Notizen von den Proben Andorra", Stücke II, pp. 347-56.

<sup>6</sup>"Max Frisch's Andorra," Encounter, XXIII, i, 1964, p. 54.

Both Henning Rischbieter<sup>7</sup> and Manfred Jurgensen,<sup>8</sup> whose interpretations of Frisch's dramas are often unusual--he views Andri's death as suicide--, also recognize Andorra's stage qualities. Hellmuth Karasek considers it Frisch's most successful play<sup>9</sup> and both Carol Petersen<sup>10</sup> and Adelheid Weise<sup>11</sup> agree that it marks an obvious and conscious development away from the earlier plays which concentrated on the message at the expense of theatrical technique. As with Biedermann und die Brandstifter, Peter Demetz can find no merit whatsoever in Andorra,<sup>12</sup> perhaps because he has not fully understood the play. The point of view from which he attacks it is a very narrow one.

Before beginning an analysis and interpretation of the stage play, I shall first look at the genesis of the story which Frisch drafted in his Tagebuch in 1946 during his first post-war visit to Germany. Two critics, Jurgensen<sup>13</sup> and Weisstein,<sup>14</sup> are quick to point out that the name Andorra actually appears earlier in the Tagebuch in a series of anecdotes taken from a former short publication, Tagebuch mit Marion.

<sup>7</sup>"Andorra von Frisch in Zürich", etc., p. 6.

<sup>8</sup>Max Frisch Die Dramen (Bern, 1968), pp. 80. 90.

<sup>9</sup>Frisch (Velber, 1969), p. 80.

<sup>10</sup>Max Frisch (Berlin, 1966), p. 78.

<sup>11</sup>Untersuchungen zur Thematik und Struktur der Dramen von Max Frisch (Göppingen, 1970), p. 117.

<sup>12</sup>Postwar German Literature (New York, 1970), pp. 121-122.

<sup>13</sup>Max Frisch Die Dramen, etc., p. 80.

<sup>14</sup>Max Frisch, etc., p. 155.



From these reflections, made more lively by the imaginary puppet-maker, Marion, one is tempted to regard Andorra as a symbol of Switzerland--a controversial point which will be discussed below. The short sketch "Der andorranische Jude" falls between Frisch's thoughts on the question of image-forming and its relation to love. This position should not be overlooked. The story is allegorical in nature, and demonstrates narratively the evil effects of forming fixed images. A young man in a country called Andorra is taken to be a Jew. All of the characteristics normally associated with Jewishness are attributed to him. He is constantly reminded of his non-Andorran traits: his lack of patriotism, his excessive intellect, his driving ambition, his lack of tact and his love of money. The community foists these characteristics on him, and soon the young man begins to realize that he is indeed different from the rest of society, and accepts his uniqueness, not sorrowfully, but proudly and disdainfully. He allows himself to be influenced by the opinions of others, and accepts himself for something he is not. He is a complete outsider, ignored by most people who can only view his stereotyped Jewishness as something negative. However, we are told that some Andorrans find merit in his Jewish attributes, still viewing him as different, though:

Auf der andern Seite gab es auch Andorraner eines freieren und fortschrittlichen Geistes, wie sie es nannten, eines Geistes, der sich der Menschlichkeit verpflichtet fühlte: sie achteten den Juden, wie sie betonten, gerade um seiner jüdischen Eigenschaften willen, Schärfe des Verstandes und so weiter.<sup>15</sup>

Yet, in essence, these Andorrans are no better than their countrymen

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<sup>15</sup>Tagebuch, p. 30.

who find fault with the young man's Jewish traits. They, too, are still guilty of image forming. Frisch believes that positive and complimentary images applied to a person or a race destroy individuality as severely and totally as negative ones. The priest in the play recognizes this. As a representative of the "Andorraner eines freieren und fortschrittlichen Geistes", he demonstrates, by his confession, that forming any kind of image, whether positive or negative, is morally wrong and dangerous.

The Jew, whom the Andorrans have created, eventually meets a horrible death,<sup>16</sup> and we are told that even those few who stood by him to the end, but did not attempt to save him, "vermißten ihn nicht-- sie empörten sich nur über jene, die ihn getötet hatten, und über die Art, wie das geschehen war, vor allem die Art."<sup>17</sup> Only after the young man's death is the truth revealed. He was not a Jew at all, but an Andorran like the rest, raised as an orphaned Jew. His real parents were later discovered.

In this brief anecdote Frisch demonstrates the deadly and inhuman effects of image-forming. This issue has been discussed in much detail in my analyses of both Nun singen sie wieder and Als der Krieg zu Ende war. Frisch makes us aware that "wir sind die Verfasser der anderen",<sup>18</sup> that often people are exactly the characters we pretend

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<sup>16</sup>The words "grausam" and "ekelhaft", Tagebuch, p. 30, allude directly to Nazi war atrocities.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 28.

them to be, not their real selves. Two pages before this story in the Tagebuch Frisch writes:

Irgendeine fixe Meinung unsrer Freunde, unsrer Eltern, unsrer Erzieher, auch sie lastet auf manchem wie ein altes Orakel. Ein halbes Leben steht unter der heimlichen Frage: Erfüllt es sich oder erfüllt es sich nicht. Mindestens die Frage ist uns auf die Stirne gebrannt, und man wird ein Orakel nicht los, bis man es zur Erfüllung bringt. ... In gewissem Grad sind wir wirklich das Wesen, das die andern in uns hineinsehen ...<sup>19</sup>

Never in his works is Frisch very far from this essential personality dilemma. The thwarted attempt of the individual to assert himself as an individual, true to his own nature and personality, appears continually in Frisch's works. He does not sacrifice his interest in a theme easily, but prefers to explore a few questions thoroughly in different genres: plays, essays, diaries, speeches, letters, and novels. If any theme can be singled out as a typically Frischian one, it is surely this theme of pre-molded images and their influence on and responsibility for the behavior of others. As already noted in his conversation with Bienek, Frisch calls this theme--"der andorranische Jude"--"mein Stoff".

The task ahead of Frisch in 1958 was to transform this abstracted maxim into a full-length theatre-piece without losing the effect of the basic structure. As with Biedermann und die Brandstifter, also the product of an earlier Tagebuch draft, Frisch created a social and political milieu, a background against which the story of the Andorran Jewish non-Jew could unfold. Whereas the prose version was "little more than an object lesson, a mathematically precise demonstration

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<sup>19</sup>Tagebuch, pp. 27-28.

designed to show the fallacy of an equation"<sup>20</sup> the play, which evolved from it, embraces a broad social-political scope whose focus of attention shifts from the individual to his environment. Dietrich Meinart notes that:

Schon das erste Bild enthält die ganze Problematik der Handlung, aber nicht der Held selbst steht im Vordergrund, sondern die Gesellschaft, in der er lebt.<sup>21</sup>

Joachim Kaiser reminds us that even the change in the title, from the narrative outline to the stage play, demonstrates the deliberate transference of emphasis:

Das Stück erzählt die Parabel anders. Nicht der Jude steht im Mittelpunkt, sondern--bereits der neu formulierte Titel deutet es an--Andorra.<sup>22</sup>

Frisch again tells the story of the young man to whom all the attributes associated with being a Jew are ascribed, but shows his sudden and decisive acceptance of himself and the personality cast on him in the inter-play between the hypothetical Jew, Andri, and the other members of the community. Because of the enlarged scope of the play, Frisch deviates from his original conception, particularly in the account of Andri's birth. He is first presented as the twenty-year-old foster-child of an Andorran teacher, who had rescued him as an infant from the persecutions of the Jew-hating "Blacks" of a neighbouring powerful nation. The teacher, Can, raises the boy as his own child giving him

<sup>20</sup>Ulrich Weisstein, Max Frisch, etc., p. 157.

<sup>21</sup>"Objektivität und Subjektivität des Existenzbewußtseins in Max Frischs Andorra", Acta Germanica, No. 2, 1967, p. 118.

<sup>22</sup>Quoted in Hellmuth Karask, Frisch, etc., p. 81. See also p. 86.

all the attention and opportunities a father might give his own flesh and blood. At first his fellow countrymen were very sympathetic towards the Jewish boy, admiring not only the teacher for his humanitarian deed, but also themselves for their tolerance. Yet, as the boy grows up, their tolerance weakens.<sup>23</sup> Andri's eagerness to play in the local football team,<sup>24</sup> and thus prove that he has a valid place in Andorran society, does not have the result he expects. On the contrary, he begins to believe that he is different, that he does possess all the Jewish traits and accepts his Jewishness with dignity.

(Stücke II, p. 273). As in the Tagebuch narrative, the truth about Andri's birth is eventually revealed. He is the natural child of the school teacher and a "Black" woman across the border with whom Can had an affair in his youth. The mother feared social criticism among her own people for bearing an illegitimate child, and the father did not wish his countrymen to know of his relations with a member of the detested "Black" nation. Consequently, the boy was brought across the border as an orphaned Jew. At that time, the mother was not aware that her lover intended to fabricate a story about the child's identity. Twenty years after the boy's birth, the "Black" lady visits Andorra. She has heard stories about an Andorran teacher who had rescued a Jewish child and suspects that the child is hers. She then questions Can, the teacher, about his reasons for concealing the boy's true identity. The

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<sup>23</sup>Although the play does not show Andri's development from childhood to adulthood, this information is supplied by the characters. See Stücke II, pp. 266, 280.

<sup>24</sup>Stücke II, p. 222.

teacher's motive is revealed as being two-fold. He was afraid that his reputation in the community would suffer, and he therefore decided to use the boy as a means of testing the avowed humanitarian principles of the Andorrans.<sup>25</sup> At first, their gentleness and kindness to the boy made them feel superior to their neighbours who were slaughtering Jews. However, gradually as the boy grew to manhood, they began to change their attitude to him. Weisstein claims that their tolerance weakened as their fear of invasion from abroad grew.<sup>26</sup> Even when the boy is abused by the townsfolk, his father, the teacher, does not find the moral courage to speak the truth. When finally, driven to despair and habitual drinking, he does tell Andri the truth about his birth, it is too late. The boy believes that this is another story, fabricated this time to protect him from the Jew-hating "Blacks" who are on the verge of invasion. The non-Jew is sacrificed at the end of the play when the invasion becomes a horrible reality.

The political implications and subtleties built into the play--the geographical position of a tiny country nextdoor to a powerful anti-semitic nation, the overt nationalism displayed by the Andorrans--have provided much material for critical conjecture and debate. Four characters in particular show themselves to be national fanatics: the priest, the doctor, the carpenter, and the soldier.<sup>27</sup> This complacent patriotism has a purposeful function in the play and has led several

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<sup>25</sup>Stücke II, pp. 265-266.

<sup>26</sup>Max Frisch, etc., p. 158.

<sup>27</sup>See Stücke II, pp. 204-5, 214, 230, 231.

critics to the assumption that Frisch has written still another anti-Swiss work. The avowed intention of Frisch himself must be considered before the interpretations of the critics can be correctly assessed. He makes one point quite clear:

Das Andorra dieses Stücks hat nichts zu tun mit dem wirklichen Kleinstaat dieses Namens. (Stücke II, p. 200.)

Ulrich Weisstein, however, has strong feelings on Frisch's choice of title for the play. He maintains that:

By choosing the name of a country easily identifiable on the map of Europe ... Frisch committed a breach of etiquette.<sup>28</sup>

In his conversation with Horst Bienek, Frisch was asked to justify his reasons for naming the play Andorra. The following was his reply:

Andorra ist kein guter Titel, der bessere fiel mir nicht ein. Schade! Was den Kleinstaat Andorra betrifft, tröste ich mich mit dem Gedanken, daß er kein Heer hat, um die Länder, die das Stück spielen, aus Mißverständnis überfallen zu können.<sup>29</sup>

This is a somewhat evasive answer to a pertinent and often speculated query.

The majority of Frisch's critics do not believe that his choice of title was unpremeditated, that he contented himself with it because his imagination suddenly proved unproductive. They are convinced that Andorra stands for his homeland, that Frisch continues in Andorra his unyielding attack on Swiss complacency and excessive national pride. Karl Schmid, in his lengthy study "Max Frisch: Andorra und die Entscheidung", remarks casually:

Gewiß gibt es auch eine Interpretation des Theaterstückes

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<sup>28</sup>Max Frisch, etc., p. 155.

<sup>29</sup>Werkstattgespräche mit Schriftstellern, etc., p. 29.

Andorra, die des Rückgriffes auf den menschlichen Zusammenhang Frischs mit der Schweiz entraten kann ... aber der Hinweis auf die Moralität aus Friedlichkeit, die Friedlichkeit aus Verschontheit, läßt keinen Zweifel darüber zu, welches Land seinerseits für das Modell Andorra Modell stand.<sup>30</sup>

Jurgensen admits that one can view the play from a historical viewpoint, interpreting it as representing Switzerland's situation during World War II.<sup>31</sup> This argument is weakened by the fact that Switzerland was never invaded by the Nazis, but one must keep in mind that Frisch believed that Switzerland would have fallen had the attempt been made.<sup>32</sup>

In an article published before Andorra finally appeared on stage, Frisch denies any connection between the Swiss situation and the play's material, reemphasizing that the play presents nothing more than "das Modell einer Gemeinschaft, die mit sich selber nicht identisch ist--keineswegs aber ein Gleichnis für die Schweiz."<sup>33</sup> Another critic, interprets the play in solely Swiss terms reminding us that the "Blacks" perform a symbolic function; the fears that the Andorrans harbour about a possible invasion from their aggressive neighbours can be viewed as the Swiss reaction to the large percentage of foreign workers, dark-skinned Latins mostly, who are working and living in Switzerland, but who are considered by many to be a threat to Switzerland's national identity. John Hammer maintains that:

The author's intention is to make the Swiss see their own treatment of southern Europeans in the same light as German maltreatment of the Jews.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>Unbehagen im Kleinstadt (Zurich/Stuttgart, 1963), p. 189.

<sup>31</sup>Max Frisch. Die Dramen etc., p. 82.

<sup>32</sup>This is made clear in Stiller in Chapter six.

<sup>33</sup>"Die Schweiz ist ein Land ohne Utopie", Ex Libris, XV, No. 3, 1960, p. 17.

<sup>34</sup>"The Humanism of Max Frisch", German Quarterly, Nov. 1969, p. 723.



As with his last play Biedermann und die Brandstifter Frisch has set up a model which leaves itself open to diverse and even "bizarre"<sup>35</sup> interpretations. All too often it is thought to be a play about anti-Semitism, a narrow interpretation, but one resulting from the weaknesses of the model form. Frisch tells us that: "Der Antisemitismus ist nur ein Beispiel."<sup>36</sup> It is this interchangeability of the model to which Friedrich Torberg takes open exception:

The terms Jew, Jewishness, Jewry ... are not models, they are not interchangeable objects of any haphazard (and likewise interchangeable) prejudices, just as anti-Semitism is not a haphazard (and likewise interchangeable) prejudice.<sup>37</sup>

He goes on to point out that Andri is given lines to speak which make a mockery of the Jewish tragedy, precisely because by the time he says such things on stage, the audience is already aware that he is not a Jew at all: "das fühlt man. ... Ob man Jud ist oder nicht". (Stücke II, p. 272) or "ich weiß, wer meine Vorfahren sind. Tausende und Hunderitausende sind gestorben am Pfahl, ihr Schicksal ist mein Schicksal" (281) are some of the lines to which Torberg refers. Although Frisch does intend us to view the treatment of Andri in an exemplary manner, hoping that we will substitute in our own minds the fate of any minority group for his fate, one cannot help but agree with Torberg; Frisch has overplayed his chosen model and rendered it ineffective. The Jewish image is not transferable. Karl August Horst feels that Frisch

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<sup>35</sup>Friedrich Torberg, "Max Frisch's Andorra", p. 54.

<sup>36</sup>Quoted in: Rolf Eckart, Max Frisch Andorra (Munich, 1967), p. 52.

<sup>37</sup>"Max Frisch's Andorra", p. 55.

would have achieved the same end had he allowed Andri to be a real Jew, not a hypothetical one.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, the Andorrans, in their pseudo-tolerant and altruistic attitudes, would have been exposed to the same extent, but Horst forgets that Frisch is primarily concerned with the results of forming negative images, not only of individuals, but also of whole races. Andri can be interpreted as the counterpart to Stiller. While Stiller flees from the image which his associates have attached to him, Andri assumes projected personality traits and molds himself into a Jew. He confronts the priest--who was originally responsible for persuading Andri to curtail his efforts to be like every Andorran and to come terms with himself<sup>39</sup>--with the following judgement:

Hochwürden haben gesagt, man muß das annehmen, und ich hab's  
angenommen. Jetzt ist es an Euch, Hochwürden, euren Jud  
anzunehmen.<sup>40</sup>

This is a crucial moment in the play. Andri reminds the priest that he, and other members of the Andorran community, are responsible for molding him into the kind of person that he now is. They had drawn his attention to his distinct characteristics, and the priest had formerly convinced him of the virtue of these non-Andorran personality traits. His present behavior is therefore the result of their conscious efforts. His transformation into a Jew is not the result of personal choice, but rather of social coercion. Andri has been forced into the

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<sup>38</sup>"Andorra mit anderen Augen", Merkur, April 1962, p. 397. Hellmuth Karasek comes near to expressing the same feeling. See Frisch, etc., p. 84.

<sup>39</sup>Stücke II, pp. 252-253.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 273.

role of the Jew and has therefore been deprived of his own personal authenticity. Frisch demonstrates in this play that the concept of individual freedom imposed from within no longer exists in twentieth century society. Our behavior and personality are governed by external forces beyond the immediate control of the individual. He demonstrates "daß die Menschen als politische Wesen so sind, wie sie sind; daß ihr Charakter durch die Gesellschaft geprägt wird, die sie bilden".<sup>41</sup> In Die Chinesische Mauer Frisch showed how present behavior and attitudes are often influenced indirectly by notable figures of history or literature. In Nun singen sie wieder and Als der Krieg zu Ende war we saw the harmful depersonalizing effects of propaganda. These problems all stem from a common base--the forming and accepting of fixed, impersonal images, and the subsequent loss of individual identity. This is also the key issue in Andorra.

Again in this play, Frisch deals with a question which has frequently appeared in his stage works since the forties: guilt--personal and collective. We saw in Biedermann and in Nun singen sie wieder that he does not believe in the second kind, and I therefore do not find it unusual that Frisch is again "skirting the problem of collective guilt"<sup>42</sup> as Weisstein remarks. Misinterpretation of the last scene has led some critics to the conclusion that Frisch does believe in the

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<sup>41</sup>Hans Heinz Holz, "Max Frisch--engagiert und privat", in Über Max Frisch, Thomas Beckermann, ed., (Frankfurt a. M., 1971) p. 246.

<sup>42</sup>Max Frisch, etc., 162.

concept of collective guilt.<sup>43</sup> However, a close study of the play disproves this theory. At intervals between the scenes, various characters involved in social relationships with Andri step out of the action proper and attempt to justify their 'innocent' part in Andri's fate. This testimony is given in a witness-box set up on stage, and is directed at the audience. Each of these characters--the innkeeper, the carpenter and his apprentice, the soldier, the doctor, and a 'somebody'--attempts to absolve himself of responsibility for Andri's death. The words: "ich bin nicht Schuld" remind us too of Biedermann's lament in the epilogue in hell. All these characters but one refuse to admit their personal and moral responsibility for Andri's martyrdom. Only the priest admits his guilt, realizing that, although he as an individual was not actively involved in physically killing Andri, nonetheless he had helped destroy the youth by convincing him that he was a Jew, and that Jewishness was not something wholly negative:

Auch ich habe mir ein Bildnis gemacht von ihm, auch ich habe ihn gefesselt, auch ich habe ihn an den Pfahl gebracht.<sup>44</sup>

He had thought that he was teaching Andri the meaning of love, brotherly love and Christian love, by persuading him to first accept himself and love himself as he was--different in his Jewishness. But, by treating Andri as something apart and different from Andorran society, the priest offered him the antithesis of Frisch's concept of love. There can be no love where there are still stereotyped opinions and prejudices. This we saw in Als der Krieg zu Ende War. Henri Plard sums up Frisch's

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<sup>43</sup>Ulrich Weisstein, Max Frisch, p. 162.

<sup>44</sup>Stücke II, p. 254.

understanding of the relationship between image-forming, love and guilt, as demonstrated in this play:

Es gibt keine wirkliche 'Erkenntnis' ohne die Liebe, die darauf verzichtet, zu begreifen, und die sich bei dem anderen gerade an das hält, was er an Undefinierbarem besitzt. Wenn wir den anderen 'mediatisieren', indem wir ihn in einen Typus verwandeln, wird er geistig von uns getötet, denn wir verweigern ihm sein eigentliches Sein. Das ist die Bedeutung von Andris Tod.<sup>45</sup>

It is of some significance to note that in this play of the sixties Frisch uses again two typical figures--the priest and the school teacher--who were featured in the first of his public plays Nun singen sie wieder written fifteen years earlier. As mentioned in my discussion of this post-war play, both types--the man of religion and the man of learning--allow atrocities to be committed. It appears that their knowledge is of no assistance in moral or humane matters. In Andorra, the school teacher, Andri's father, hangs himself after the execution of his son, unable to continue living with his shame and guilt, while the priest must live out his life in the shadow of his Christian betrayal. Again, the traditional upholders of a conventional humanism are unmasked.

In the Tagebuch sketch, Frisch gives no concrete or extraneous reasons for the young man's death, which was "so grausam und ekelhaft".<sup>46</sup> We are left to deduce that he had been killed merely because it was presumed that he was a Jew. That was his crime. When we consider that

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<sup>45</sup>"Der Dramatiker Max Frisch und sein Werk für das Theater der Gegenwart", Universitas, Vol. 19, 1964, p. 912.

<sup>46</sup>Tagebuch, p. 30.

over four million people were executed in this century for the same reason, the story is quite plausible, although horribly primitive, as it stands. However, in the play, Andri is convicted and killed by the "Blacks" on two counts: first, because of his Jewishness, and secondly, because he is accused of killing a member of the "Black" nation, who was also his real mother. The murder of the Senora on Andorran soil provides an excuse for the long threatened "Black" invasion. Right from the first scene of the play, the audience is made aware of the shadow of fear hanging over the citizens of Andorra. Barblin, the teacher's daughter and Andri's fiancée, offers this complacent reason for a political takeover:

Sie werden uns überfallen die Schwarzen da drüben, weil sie neidisch sind auf unsre weißen Häuser (Stücke II, p. 203).

The white houses of the Andorrans are not mere stage props but have an underlying symbolic function. They represent the seemingly virtuous life of the citizens of Andorra and at the same moment constantly draw to mind the neighbouring "Blacks" whom the audience are to view as an evil and immoral people. The white-washing of the Andorran houses, the concern for maintaining spotless facades, can be interpreted allegorically as a means of hiding the moral corruption which exists behind these walls.<sup>47</sup>

The tension leading up to the actual invasion is gradually

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<sup>47</sup>This can also be related to Frisch's satirical views on the Swiss "Reinemacherei". The concern of his countrymen for creating positive impressions through outward appearances obscures the less obvious negative aspects of their way of life. One has to look beneath the surface to discover the "blacker" side of Swiss society--at least in Frisch's eyes.

heightened throughout the various scenes of the play.<sup>48</sup> By the time the Senora arrives in Andorra,<sup>49</sup> an air of uneasiness already exists among the townsfolk. The innkeeper is criticized for allowing the woman to stay in his establishment. The carpenter's apprentice kicks the lady's suitcases to one side, but is warned by the doctor:

Unsinn. Darauf warten sie ja bloß. Belästigung von Reisenden in Andorra! Damit sie einen Vorwand haben gegen uns. So ein Unsinn! ... Wir liefern ihnen keinen Vorwand.<sup>50</sup>

Yet, this is exactly what does happen. The "Blacks" are given the excuse for which they have been waiting. It is the innkeeper, though, who actually throws the stone that kills Andri's mother--an open display of his hatred for the "Blacks" which he had previously hidden behind a business-like hospitality. Yet, Andri becomes the scapegoat. The "Blacks" would never suspect that an Andorran was guilty, that one would willfully bring about the annexation of one's own country. By remaining silent, the Andorrans rid themselves of their Jew, yet cannot be blamed, on criminal or legal grounds, for his extermination.

Two strands of action have been woven together in this play: the personal, psychological theme--image-forming and its detrimental effects on the individual,--and the social-political one--the neurosis of a nation threatened from without. This blending together of themes and levels of action culminates in the 'Judenschau' in the twelfth and

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<sup>48</sup>See Stücke II, pp. 205, 239, and 256, in particular.

<sup>49</sup>The timing of her visit, after twenty years of neglecting her son's welfare, is only one of the many details (flaws?) which give the play the features of a traditional fate tragedy. See Siegfried Melchinger, "Andorra", Stuttgarter Zeitung, Nov. 4, 1961, quoted in Karasek, Frisch, etc., p. 83.

<sup>50</sup>Stücke II, p. 259.

last scene. In some respects, this scene of organized terror is reminiscent of the mock trial of the deaf mute in Die Chinesische Mauer. Both times, an innocent individual falls prey to the 'justice' of the group in power. However, the horror of the spectacle is greatly intensified in Andorra by the use of visual and aural effects. Frisch has now learned how to use the full potential of the theatrical medium, thereby giving his themes the effective stage exposition which was lacking in his earliest dramatic efforts. Not all critics, though, speak favourably of Frisch's depiction of selective extermination. While Joachim Kaiser praises it as a work of real dramatic art:

So wie Schönberg in seinem 'Überlebenden von Warschau' oder Picasso in seinem 'Guernica' Bild hat sich Frisch in dieser Szene dem reinen Grauen gestellt.<sup>51</sup>

Karl August Horst labels it "eine obszöne Show",<sup>52</sup> and Hans Holz writes: "Die Szene paßt nicht in das Stück".<sup>53</sup> Yet, the "Judenschau" fuses together the many themes apparent in the play and presents them in a forceful and provocative way. The very last moments on stage, after Andri has been removed by the "Blacks", repeat the opening scene, with Barblin whitewashing her house (this time with her head shaven), while the soldier<sup>54</sup> and the priest attempt conversation with her. Like Die Chinesische Mauer and Biedermann und die Brandstifter Frisch has given this play a circular structure to demonstrate that nothing has been

<sup>51</sup>Quoted in Karasek, Frisch, etc., p. 90.

<sup>52</sup>"Andorra mit anderen Augen", etc., p. 399.

<sup>53</sup>"Max Frisch--engagiert und privat", etc., p. 243.

<sup>54</sup>In spite of his previous determination to keep the "Blacks" out of Andorra, he becomes their accomplice. He too is a coward like the rest.



learned from Andri's death, that the Andorrans, in their unawareness of their own guilty involvement in his fate, will continue life as usual and perhaps permit the same thing to recur.

This play, like the other four discussed in this thesis, ends on a note of deep-rooted pessimism. Frisch sees no hope for the future of a nation, (or mankind in general, which permits such atrocities within its borders. The Andorrans are shown to be no better than the "Blacks" who openly exterminate an unwanted minority group. Friedrich Torberg remarks that "there is not a single decent person in the whole play".<sup>55</sup> Even Barblin is put under suspicion. Frisch himself shows that he was uncertain about her portrayal.<sup>56</sup> Although, at the end of the play, we see her in a situation not unlike Mee Lan's at the end of Die Chinesische Mauer--Barblin can be viewed as "die Geschändete" and the priest as "der Ohnmächtige"<sup>57</sup>--the audience never knows the true story of the soldier's nocturnal visit to her room.

Looking back, one might be tempted to conclude that Frisch's dramatic career shows a pronounced lack of development. He is, after all, lamenting the same issues in 1961 as in his play of 1945, Nun singen sie wieder. However, although we can observe no increasing optimism in his viewpoint, no progression from the post-war years, the lack of development in theme is compensated by an improved and refined understanding of the theatrical medium and the tools of the stage. His notes written during

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<sup>55</sup>"Max Frischs Andorra", etc., p. 56.

<sup>56</sup>Stücke II, pp. 349-51.

<sup>57</sup>Stücke I, p. 244.

rehearsals of Andorra in Zurich<sup>58</sup> indicate how very much Frisch has learned about projecting an idea and a situation on stage. Objects used as stage props are not merely perfunctory but take on a symbolic meaning linked with the story on stage:<sup>59</sup> the jukebox represents Andri's supposed love of money; the white houses of the town symbolize the 'virtues' of the Andorrans and constantly draw to mind their counterparts the "Blacks", considered an evil people; the chairs in the second scene denote Andri's thwarted attempt to cast off his Jewishness; the stone which the innkeeper picks up in scene twelve represents both his personal guilt and the guilt of the Andorrans in general --to name a few.

Frisch's dramaturgy and his sincere humanistic concerns have reached a common peak in Andorra. Unlike Biedermann und die Brandstifter, this play is humourless. The questions it raises are too serious for comedy. Frisch intends us to examine our own treatment of minority groups and of other individuals whom we classify as different, and then ask ourselves if we are not responsible for their behavior, which we despise. Yet unless the audience does see itself mirrored in the Andorrans, this self-examination will not necessarily result from viewing the play on stage. This is a basic flaw in the play's structure. Frisch shows us corruption and evil which is "durchschnittlich

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<sup>58</sup>Stücke II, pp. 347-57.

<sup>59</sup>For a detailed analysis of Frisch's use of objects as symbols, see Rolf Eckart, Max Frisch: Andorra, etc., pp. 36-53.

und alltäglich",<sup>60</sup> which exists in all of us. Andorra is therefore not a play about anti-semitism, or a strictly anti-Swiss work. It is also not a political play in the narrow sense of the word, but is an analysis of social behavior and the plight of the individual manipulated by group pressures. Its themes are universally applicable. It was, however, not always successful on international stages. In New York in 1963 it received a poor reception and was withdrawn after only a few performances. The audience were baffled and confused by its meaning. Communication between playwright and audience broke down completely; for a devoted humanist, this was the ultimate sign of defeat. Frisch had hoped that this play would change the public's attitude to their own behavior, would cause them to reexamine the impulses and habits which make up their own lives. He did not succeed. Now after only ten years, Andorra is almost forgotten and rarely performed.

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<sup>60</sup>H. H. Holz, "Max Frisch--engagiert und privat", etc., p. 240.

## Conclusion

After Andorra's disappointing international reception Frisch turned away from the theatre for several years and began to devote much time and energy to a new novel Mein Name sei Gantenbein which finally appeared in print in 1964. He has given us only one play in the last decade, Biographie Ein Spiel (1967), but this is radically unlike any of the previous dramas in that it explores not a theme, but a theatrical form: the drama of variation and chance, based on the experimentation already begun in his last novel. His own association with the theatre, his attempt to reach the minds and souls of his public, did not have the results he anticipated. His humanistic voice has gone unheard.

In a speech given in Stuttgart in 1965 acknowledging the reception of the Schiller-Preis of Baden-Württemberg, Frisch expresses his growing disillusionment with the theatre:

Ungern gebe ich zu, daß ich nicht nur immer seltener ins Theater gehe, sondern immer unfreiwilliger, meistens nur noch aus Kollegialität, von vornherein nervös, auch wenn das Stück, das hinter dem Vorhang wartet, nicht ein eigenes ist. Schon der Ort, der architektonische, irritiert mich durch Reminiszenz, der ich mißtraue. ... Ich muß gestehen, daß auch die besten Aufführungen, die uns die Brecht-Schule liefert, mich befriedigen wie Kunstgewerbe, nichts weiter ...<sup>1</sup>

The theatre for Frisch has become something against which he has fought since the forties: a 'cultural' past-time. He has come to realize that it is a poor medium for humanistic expression, because the public does not take it seriously enough, and therefore does not relate the action on stage to their own lives.

This ineffectiveness of the dramatic form can be attributed

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<sup>1</sup>Öffentlichkeit als Partner, etc., pp. 92-93.

to a number of factors, not the least of which is Frisch's choice of stage characterization. Throughout the five plays discussed in this thesis one notes that the chief protagonists of each are not fully rounded, realistic people, but are for the most part general types who represent Frisch's own abstracted views. Although Frisch is deeply concerned with individuals as unique personality entities, he has not been able to present them on stage. He has experimented with different dramatic forms, and has mixed his stage techniques - farce, parable and model theatre - in an effort to convey his message in the most effective way possible; yet, he has not extended this variety to the portrayal of his main stage characters. His characters are just not convincing as human beings. They are static and stereotyped, created and used by Frisch as tools of a message which has been formulated already. They are, in short, projections of an idea, not real people. Karl, Herbert, and the school teacher in Nun singen sie wieder, the Contemporary in Die Chinesische Mauer, Agnes in Als der Krieg zu Ende war, Biedermann in Biedermann und die Brandstifter, and Andri, the priest, and Can in Andorra, all fall into this category. Hoping to shock his audiences out of their complacency, Frisch intended them to identify with the characters on stage, to see themselves mirrored in the stage figures. This is, however, a high and unrealistic expectation if the playwright presents personality and professional types instead of characters who are convincing and true-to-life as individuals. Frisch's characters are mere extensions of his opinions, are embodiments of fixed "Bildnisse" which he has already formed in his own mind.

The theatre is too poor a vehicle for the communication of Frisch's personal humanism. His failure to convey his thoughts to the public at large is more the result of the genre than the author's sincerity. Frisch's issues are personal ones, ones of conscience and individual morals: man's inability or refusal to perceive his own or another's guilt, man's tendency to belittle or disregard altogether the inhumane and the horrible, the meaning of love and its relation to the question of image forming, man's thwarted search for his personal identity, and the individual's responsibility for the welfare of the commonweal. These kinds of issues are more suited to a private medium, the novel, than to a public medium, the theatre. It appears that Frisch himself has become aware of this factor as he has not used the theatre for dialectical purposes in over a decade. However, his 'engagement' is still obvious in his journalistic commentaries on present-day world conditions, and particularly political and social conditions in his homeland. His latest published work Tagebuch 1966-1971 (Frankfurt a. M., 1972) is a continuing testimony to his sincere humanistic sentiments. As with his first diary, Tagebuch 1946-1949, this genre permits the direct communication of the author's intent and opinions, something which was not possible for Frisch in the theatre. We may therefore conclude that after two decades of writing for the theatre Frisch has realized that his theatrical and humanistic interests are not simultaneously compatible.

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